KRISTY'S RAINY·DAY·PICNIC

Olive Thorne Miller

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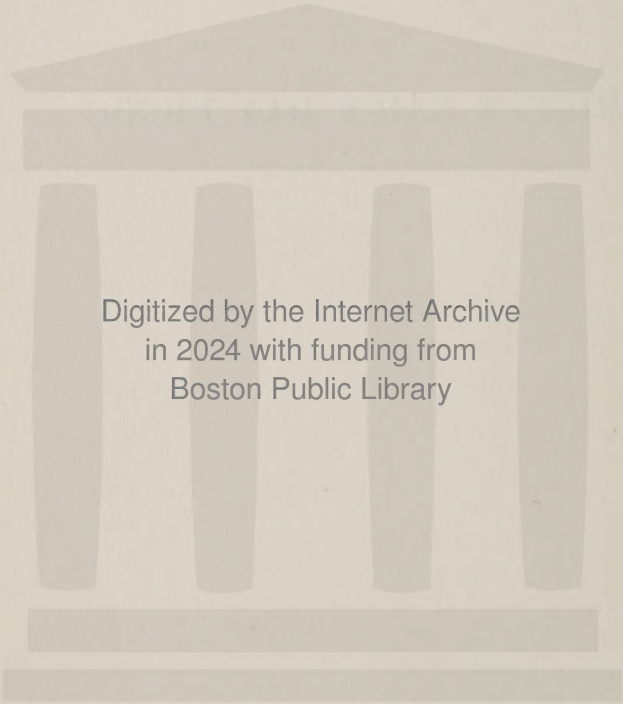
KRISTY'S RAINY-DAY PICNIC

Olive Thorne Miller

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KRISTY'S RAINY DAY PICNIC


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They were playing that the wax Doll was sick.

KRISTY'S RAINY DAY PICNIC

BY

OLIVE THORNE MILLER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ETHEL N. FARNSWORTH



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KRISTY'S RAINY DAY PICNIC

CHAPTER I

THE RAINY DAY

"I THINK it's just horrid!" said Kristy, standing before the window, peering out into a world of drizzling rain. "Every single thing is ready and every girl promised to come, and now it has to go and rain; 'n' I believe it'll rain a week, anyway!" she added as a stronger gust dashed the drops against the glass.

Kristy's mother, who was sitting at her sewing-table at work, did not speak at once, and Kristy burst out again:—

"I wish it would never rain another drop; it's always spoiling things!"

"Kristy," said her mother quietly, "you remind me of a girl I knew when I was young."

"What about her?" asked Kristy rather sulkily.

"Why, she had a disappointment something like yours, only it was n't the weather, but her own carelessness, that caused it. She cried and made a great fuss about it, but before night she was very glad it had happened."

"She must have been a very queer girl," said Kristy.

"She was much such a girl as you, Kristy; and the reason she was glad was because her loss was the cause of her having a far greater pleasure."

"Tell me about it," said Kristy, interested at once, and leaving the window.

"Well, she was dressed for a party at the house of one of her friends, and as she ran down the walk to join the girls in the hay-wagon that was to take them all there, her dress caught on something and tore a great rent clear across the front breadth."

"Well; could n't she put on another?" asked Kristy.

"Girls did n't have many dresses in those days, and that was a new one made on purpose



Kristy stood, peering into a world of drizzling Rain.

for the occasion. She had no other that she would wear."

"What did she do?" asked Kristy.

"She turned and ran back into the house, held up her ruined dress for her mother to see, and then flung herself on the lounge with a burst of tears. Her mother had to go out and tell the girls that Bessie could not go."

"That was horrid!" said Kristy earnestly; "but why was she glad, for you said she was?"

"She was, indeed; for an hour later her father drove up to the door and said that he was obliged to go to the city on business, and if Bessie could be ready in fifteen minutes, he would take her and let her spend a few days with her cousin Helen, who had been urging her to visit her. This was a great treat, for Bessie had never been to a large city, and there was nothing she wanted so much to do. You see, if she had been away at the party, she would have missed this pleasure, for her father could not wait longer. She forgot her disappointment in a moment, and hurried to get

ready, while her mother packed a satchel with things she would need."

By this time Kristy was seated close by her mother, eagerly interested in the story.

Mrs. Crawford paused.

"Do go on, mamma," said Kristy; "tell me more about her. Did she have a nice time in the city?"

"She did," went on Mrs. Crawford; "so nice that her father was persuaded to leave her there, and she stayed more than a week. There was one scrape, however, that the girls got into that was not so very nice."

"Tell me about it," said Kristy eagerly.

"Well," said her mother, "this is the way it happened."

CHAPTER II

PLAYING DOCTOR; AND WHAT CAME OF IT

One rainy Saturday afternoon when they were not allowed to go out, Bessie and Helen were playing with their dolls in the nursery.

Helen had a large family of dolls of many kinds: stiff kid-bodied dolls with heads made of some sort of composition that broke very easily, and legs and feet from the knees down of wood, with slippers of pink or blue painted on; others all wood, with jointed legs and arms, that could sit down; whole families of paper dolls cut from cardboard, with large wardrobes of garments of gilt and colored paper which the girls made themselves. Then there was a grand wax doll with real hair which hung in curls, and lips slightly open showing four tiny white teeth. This lovely creature was dressed in pink gauze, and was far too fine for every day. It lived in the

lower bureau drawer in Helen's room, and was brought out only on special occasions.

Dearest of all was a doll her mother made for her, of white cloth with a face painted on it, and head of hair made of what used to be called a "false front." This delightful doll was quite a wonder in those days. It had a wardrobe as well made as Helen's own, including stockings and shoes, and could be dressed and undressed and combed and brushed to her heart's content.

Well, one morning, — a rainy Saturday, as I said, — the two girls were very busy with the big family of dolls. They were playing that the wax doll was sick and they were Doctor and Nurse. Many tiny beads — called pills — and several drops from a bottle out of the family medicine case had been thrust between the teeth of this unlucky creature, when the thought struck Helen that a living patient would be more fun than a doll. So she hunted up a half-grown kitten that belonged to her little brother Robbie.

The kitten was dressed for her part in a

white towel pinned around her and a pointed cap of paper on her head. Very droll she looked, but she was not so easy to manage as the doll. Beads she refused to swallow, but thrust them out on her small pink tongue, and she struggled violently when a drop of the medicine was given to her. In fact, her struggles made Helen's arm joggle, and sent more down her throat than she meant to give her.

Finally, the kitten struggled and fought so violently that they let her go, when she ran quickly down the stairs, and hid where they could not find her.

The next morning the kitten was missing, to Robbie's great grief. The house was searched in vain, and the two girls began to fear that medicine was not good for her.

Feeling very guilty, they hunted everywhere on the place, and at last found the poor little dead body behind a box in the cellar, where she had crept to die.

The girls were horrified to think their play had killed her. They felt like murderers, and

stole out into the arbor to think and plan what they should do. They dared not confess; they feared some sort of punishment for their crime, and they knew it would make Robbie very unhappy.

After much talk, they decided to dispose of the body secretly and not tell any one of their part in the sad business. But how to do it was the question that troubled them. They dared not bury it, for fresh digging in that small city yard would arouse suspicion at once. Bessie suggested that they should carry it far off in the night and throw it away. This plan seemed the best they could think of, till Helen said they would not be allowed to go out in the city after dark.

"I'll tell you," said Bessie at last. "I can do up a nice package, — Uncle Tom taught me, — and I'll do it up, and we can take it away in the daytime; no one will know what it is, and then we can lose it somewhere."

This plan was adopted. Helen got paper and string, and when everybody had gone to church that evening, they brought up the poor

kitten, and Bessie made a very neat package which no one could suspect. This they hid away till they could get it out of the house.

After school the next day they got leave to visit a schoolmate who lived far up town, and Helen's mother gave them money to ride in the omnibus — or stage, as they called it — which would take them there. There were no street cars then.

Hiding the small bundle under her cape, Bessie slipped out at the door, feeling now not only like a murderer, but like a thief besides.

They took the stage and rode up town, the package lying openly on Helen's lap. When the stage reached Nineteenth Street it stopped, and to Helen's horror one of her schoolmates came in. She was delighted to see the girls, and seated herself beside Helen.

"Where you going?" she asked.

"We 're going to see Lottie Hart," answered Helen.

"Why, so am I!" she exclaimed; "ain't it fun that we met so?"

"Yes," said Helen, but she was filled with dismay. How could she get rid of her package!

"What are you taking up to Lottie?" was the next question, as the unfortunate bundle was noticed.

"Oh, nothing!" said Helen, trying to speak carelessly; "it's something of mine."

Julia looked as if she did not believe her but said no more, though she looked sharply at it.

Meanwhile Helen was trying to plan some way of getting out of the unpleasant scrape, and at last she said hurriedly, pulling the strap at the same moment to stop the stage, "We're going to stop here to do an errand; we'll come on soon. Tell Lottie we're coming," she added, as she saw the look of surprise on her friend's face.

"Why, I'll stop too — and we'll all go on together," she began, half rising, but Helen interrupted rather shortly: "No; you go on and tell her we're coming; we might be detained, you know." And without another word

the two conspirators hurried out and turned down a side street.

"Was n't it horrid that Jule should get in?" said Helen, as soon as the stage had moved on. "She's the greatest tattler in school; she 'll make a great talk about it. She was very curious about that package."

"Where shall we go now?" asked Bessie. "Shall we really go to Lottie's after we lose the bundle?"

"No indeed! They 'd tease us to death about it. I don't know where we 'll go," she added, for she was getting rather cross. "I wish we 'd left the old cat in the cellar anyway; it was a silly plan to do this."

"I think you 're real mean to talk so," said Bessie indignantly, for it was her plan, you remember. "I don't care if the whole town knows it! it was n't my fault anyway — 'n' I 'm going home tomorrow — so there!"

This brought Helen to her senses, for she did n't want Bessie to go home, and she remembered that she was the one who had spilled the medicine.

"I did n't mean that" — she said quickly; "I meant going in the stage 'n' all that."

During this little talk the girls had walked a block or two. "But where shall we go now?" asked Bessie anxiously, for she felt lost among so many streets all looking just alike.

"There 's a ferry at the end of the street," said Helen, brightening up; "I didn't think of that. We might cross it and lose the bundle in the river."

"That 'll be easy," said Bessie, and with fresh courage they walked on.

It was a long way to the ferry, and two rather tired girls went on to the boat, having paid their fare with the last penny they had, for they had expected to walk home from Lottie's. They forgot until they had started that they had no money to get back, and that thought so frightened Helen that she almost forgot about the first pressing business of getting rid of her package.

There seemed to be as much trouble about that as ever, for the boat was full of passen-

gers and somebody was all the time looking at them. They dared not drop it in when any one was looking, for fear they would think it very queer, and perhaps try to get it for them. Helen had heard of such things.

They walked to the front end of the boat, but could not find a chance when no one was looking; and indeed no doubt their manner was so strange that they aroused the curiosity of everybody.

One of the deck-hands, too, kept close watch of them, and when they went to the front of the boat, hoping to get where they would not be noticed, he came up to them and said to Helen:

"Look out, Miss! you might slip and fall overboard," and kept near them as if he suspected that she meant to jump into the river.

"We can't do it here," Helen whispered; "we'll have to go back — and I haven't another cent; have you any money, Bessie?"

"No!" answered Bessie in horror; "oh, what can we do!"

Helen thought very hard for a few minutes, and then remembering that they had paid

their fare in the ferry-house, she thought perhaps if they stayed on the boat and did not go through the ferry-house, they might go back without paying. She whispered all this to Bessie, who by this time was frightened half out of her wits, wondering if they would ever get back over the river, and thinking of all the terrible things she had heard in stories about being lost. She looked so scared that Helen, who was used to the city and was sure she could find some way, had to seem more brave than she really felt.

"We better go back into the cabin," she whispered, "so that man won't see that we don't get off." So they took seats in one corner of the cabin, as the people began to hurry off, hoping with all their hearts that no one would notice them.

But that deck-hand did not lose sight of them, and when the cabin was empty he came in. "It 's time to get off, Miss," he said; "we don't go any farther."

"We don't want to get off," said Helen; "we 're going back."

"But you have n't paid your fare," he said gruffly.

On this Bessie really began to cry, and Helen, though she tried to brave it out, trembled.

"Can't we go back without, if we don't go to the ferry-house?" she said, with trembling lips. "We have n't any more money and we want to go home."

On this the man was softened and probably ashamed of his suspicions, for he turned and said as he went out of the door, "Well, if the capt'n don't object, I don't care."

Then the people began to come in, and the two girls sat trembling, dreading that every man who entered was the captain to demand their fare.

In this new trouble they forgot the bundle, and did not attempt to get rid of it on the river.

When they were safely away from the ferry-boat and on the street on the home side, they felt better, and began to think again of what they wanted now more than ever to do. They both felt that if they ever got safely home

and out of this scrape they would never — never —get into another one again.

As they trudged wearily along, full of these good resolutions, they came to a row of houses set back a little in the yards with grass and shrubs growing.

Bessie whispered, "Could n't you drop it under one of these bushes, Helen? See; there 's a lilac very thick and down to the ground."

Sure enough; there was a most convenient bush close to the fence.

"Is anybody looking?" whispered Helen, glancing around fearfully.

"No; I don't see anybody," answered Bessie. "Do it! do it! quick!" eagerly.

No sooner said than done; the package that had made them so much trouble was hastily thrust far under a broad-spreading lilac bush, and with a gasp, Helen started on a mad run down the street followed closely by Bessie. Not until they had turned a corner and passed into another street, did the two culprits dare to take a long breath and begin to walk.

As they got farther and farther away, and no one followed them, they grew less frightened, and then they found themselves very, very tired, with still a long way to go to reach home.

It was almost dark when two tired and hungry girls reached the steps of their own home and safety.

"I'm half starved!" said Helen, as they dragged themselves up the stairs.

"So 'm I," said Bessie.

"You go on to my room," whispered Helen, "and I'll go down and see if I can get something to eat — it is n't near supper time."

In a few minutes she came up with some cakes which they eagerly devoured, and felt that their troubles were over. They had, however, one more ordeal.

At the supper table Helen's mother asked: "How did you find Lottie? Did you have a pleasant time?"

Helen hesitated a moment and then said hastily: —

"We did n't go there; we met Jule Day-

ton going there, so we got out at S — Street and walked down to the river."

Helen's mother eyed the girls sharply. "You must have had a long walk."

"We did," answered Helen, "and we're awful hungry;" adding quickly as she saw another question on her mother's lips, "I'll tell you all about it after supper."

And she did. Alone with her mother the two girls confessed — told the whole story and promised never, never again to try to deceive.

"That was a good story," said Kristy, as her mother ended. "You never told me anything about that Bessie before. Do you know anything more about her?"

Kristy's manner was rather suspicious and Mrs. Crawford smiled as she answered: —

"Yes; I know a good deal about her and I'll tell you more some day."

"Tell me now!" begged Kristy; "I believe I know who she was. Was her name really Bessie?"

"No matter about that," answered Mrs. Crawford; "if I told you her real name, perhaps I should n't like to tell you so much about her."

"Oh, well! then you need n't; but I guess I can guess."

"I guess you can guess all you like," said mamma, smiling again.

"One thing more I remember now that happened during that famous visit, which was not quite so tragical as the death of the poor kitten."

CHAPTER III

A SCHOOLGIRL'S JOKE

THE school to which Helen went — and where Bessie went with her — was not like the great schoolhouses they have now. It had but two rooms, one for girls and the other for boys. Some of the school windows opened on the street, and one morning when all was quiet in the schoolroom an organ-grinder suddenly began to play under the open windows.

The girls looked up from their books and listened, the teacher looked annoyed, but thinking he would soon go on, she waited. The girls began to get restless; study was at an end; and at last when the grinder had played all his airs and begun again, the teacher went to the door to ask him to go. In the hall she met the teacher of the boys, who was on the same errand, for the boys

were all excited and getting very noisy. In fact school work was stopped in both rooms.

The man refused to move on, and at last gave as his excuse, that he had been hired by one of the scholars to play there an hour.

The teachers tried to make him tell who had hired him, and finally he said it was a small boy with red hair. Finding him determined to earn his money by playing the whole hour, the teachers went back to their rooms, sure that they knew the culprit and that he should be punished.

There was only one small boy with red hair in the school, and he was called up and accused of the prank. He declared that he knew nothing about it, — that he never did it, — and began to cry when the teacher brought from his desk a long ruler which the boys knew too well, for when one broke the rules he was punished by being first lectured before the whole school, and then ordered to hold out his hand and receive several blows from it.

The poor little red-haired boy cried harder than ever when this appeared, and again pro-

tested that he did not do it. Then a voice from the back of the room spoke timidly: "Perhaps the girls know something about it."

This was a new idea; it had not occurred to the master that the man might have told a falsehood to shield the real culprit, and he laid down the ruler, telling the sobbing boy that he might go to his seat while he inquired into it. Meanwhile the organ-grinder went on with his work and the whole school was in an uproar.

When the girls' teacher heard the suggestion that perhaps some of her pupils might be guilty, she was very much vexed. But ordering all books put aside, she gave them a serious lecture on the trouble that had been made by that mischief, and then called upon the guilty one, if she were there, to rise and receive her sentence, and save the small boy sobbing in the next room from a punishment that he did not deserve.

Upon this, sixty girls — the whole room full — rose together as one girl.

The teacher was amazed — almost in con-

sternation. She first made one of them tell the story, when it came out that it was the prank of one of their number — whose name she would not give.

"Who was it?" interrupted Kristy eagerly; "was it Bessie?"

"No," answered her mother, "not alone; but it was her cousin Helen who was full of such foolish jokes, seconded by Bessie. She had asked the organ-grinder how much he would charge to play under the school windows an hour, and when he said sixty cents, she had gone around among the girls and got a penny from each so that all should be guilty."

The teacher's next thought was how to punish sixty girls, but she was quick-witted, and bidding them resume their seats, she gave them another lecture, and then said: "Since you are all guilty, you shall all be punished."

She then ordered text-books to be laid aside and slates and pencils to be brought out

— for this happened before quiet paper had taken the place of noisy slates.

Each girl produced from her desk a large slate, and waited further orders. Then the teacher wrote in large letters on the blackboard these words : —

I LOVE TO HEAR THE ORGAN-GRINDER PLAY

and ordered each girl to write that upon her slate over and over and over again for one hour.

This seemed like a very easy punishment, and then began a vigorous scratching of pencils, with shy laughing glances between the culprits, while the teacher took a book and began to read, keeping, however, a sharp eye on the pupils to see that no one shirked her work. When one announced that her slate was full, she was told to sponge it off and begin again.

Never was an hour so long ! The lively scratching of pencils soon began to lag, and the teacher had to spur them on again, and now and then she walked down between the desks and looked at the slates to see that no one failed to obey orders.

Many eager glances were turned upon the clock; recess-time came — and went; the boys were let out and their shouts and calls came in at the window, but the silence in the room of the girls was broken only by the scratching of slate-pencils and the sighs of weary girls, — for it had long ceased to be funny.

When at last that tiresome old clock struck the hour, they were made to put away their slates and resume their lessons, and no recess at all did they have that morning.

"That was an awful funny prank," said Kristy; "and was n't it a cute punishment!" she added, getting up to look out of the window again. "Rain! rain! rain!" she said, in a vexed tone, "nothing but rain to-day."

"There are worse storms than rain, Kristy," said her mother.

"I don't see what can be worse," said Kristy, returning to her seat.

"What would you say to a blizzard?" asked mamma.

"What 's a blizzard?" said Kristy.

"It 's a kind of storm they have out on the western prairies; let me tell you about one."

CHAPTER IV

ALL NIGHT IN THE SCHOOLHOUSE

It was very quiet one winter day in the little schoolhouse out on the prairie near the village of B — .

The afternoon was wearing away, and thoughts of home and the warm supper awaiting them began to stir in the children's thoughts, and many glances were turned to the clock which was busily ticking the minutes away.

Suddenly, without the least warning, a severe blast of wind struck the little schoolhouse and shook it to its foundations, while at the same moment a great darkness fell upon the world, as if the sun had been stricken out of the heavens.

"A blizzard!" came trembling from the lips of the older scholars, who well knew the enemy which had suddenly descended upon them.

Miss Grey, the teacher, left her seat and hurried to the window. Nothing was to be seen but snow. Not the soft, feathery flakes of eastern storms, but sharp ice-like particles that cut and stung when it beat against the flesh, like needles.

Here was a situation! Though new to the country, Miss Grey had been warned of the terrible storms which sometimes descended upon it, obliterating every landmark, and so blinding and bewildering one that even the sense of direction was lost, while the icy wind that came with it, seemed to freeze the very vitals, and left many lost and frozen in its path.

Though it was her first sight of the monster, she recognized it in a moment, and her instant thought was, "O God! what can I do with these children?" And a faintness, almost a feeling of despair, came over her. Then seeing that all order was at an end, and the children were huddled about her, some crying and all terrified, she pulled herself together, realizing that to avert a real panic

she must arouse herself. She returned to her seat, and in as calm a voice as she could command, she ordered the children back to their seats, to give her time to consider what she could do.

"Please may I go home?" came anxiously from small lips of the younger children. Older ones knew well that one step beyond the door they would be lost, for years of experience with blizzards and the stern directions of parents never to venture out in one was thoroughly impressed on their minds.

"Wait till I think!" was the answer of the teacher to these requests; and for a few moments she did try to think, but all the time she knew in her heart that she should have to keep them all, and make them as comfortable as she could.

At length she spoke. "You know, children, that it will not be safe to go out in the storm. You could not find your way; you would be lost and perhaps perish in the snow. We must just be patient and make ourselves as comfortable as we can. You may put away

your books," —for she saw that study or school work would be impossible in their state of excitement. With sudden inspiration she went on: "We will have a recess, and I will tell you a story, but first we must have some more wood. Harry, will you bring some?"

Harry Field was her oldest scholar and gave her the most trouble. He was in fact full-grown and seventeen years old. He did the work of a man on the farm all summer, but being anxious to get more of an education, he went to school in winter.

That was commendable, and Miss Grey was glad to help him; but though a man in size, he had not outgrown the boy in him, and he sometimes gave her a great deal of trouble by putting the younger ones up to mischief or teasing them past endurance.

With Harry, Miss Grey dreaded the most trouble, but real danger brought out his manly side and he at once ranged himself on her side to stand by her and help.

On her request, he went to the passage-way where wood was kept and returned with

a small armful and a white face. He whispered to Miss Grey: "This is the last stick!"

A new horror was thus added to the situation, but Miss Grey assumed a confidence she by no means felt. "Then we must burn up the wood-box," she said calmly.

"I will split it up," said Harry; "I know where the axe is kept."

This was some relief. Permission was granted, and in a few minutes the vigorous blows of the axe were heard, and soon he returned with a glowing face and a big armful of wood. Miss Grey called for quiet and began to tell her story.

Never was story-telling so hard; she could not collect her thoughts; she could not think of a single thing that would interest that frightened crowd. The blizzard — the horror of it — the dread of what it might bring to these children under her charge — then the terrors of hunger and cold, and panic of fear, which seemed impossible to prevent, almost deprived her of her reason. She felt a strong

impulse to run away, to fling herself into the very thick of the storm and perish.

Then a glance at the intelligent and fearless face of Harry gave her new courage. "Harry," she said, in a low tone, "you are the oldest here — you must help me. Can't you tell a story while I try to think?"

"I don't know," hesitated Harry.

"Do think!" she said earnestly; "these children will work themselves into a panic, and then how can we manage them!"

"Well perhaps I can," said Harry, pleased to be her helper; then after a moment, "I guess I can; I'll tell them about a bear I saw once in the woods."

"Oh, do!" said Miss Grey, sinking back in her chair.

In a moment Harry began, and as the story was really a thrilling one and he told it with enthusiasm, the children quieted down and listened.

Meanwhile Miss Grey had somewhat recovered herself and made some definite plans for the rest of the day.

When the story ended with the sensational end of the bear, the details of which Harry enlarged upon till they became very exciting, Miss Grey was calm again.

Thanking Harry, she then proposed to tell a story herself, when a faint little voice spoke up, "Oh, I'm so hungry," and was echoed by many more, "So 'm I."

This was the most pressing trouble, as Miss Grey well knew. With Harry at the axe, they could be kept warm; but how to satisfy their hunger! She had a plan, however.

"Did any of you have any dinner left in your baskets?" she asked.

Two or three said that they had, when she ordered all baskets and pails to be brought to her.

Even when all were emptied there was a very meagre supply for a dozen hearty, country appetites, and her heart sank; but, telling those who had anything that of course what there was must be divided between all, she portioned it out as well as she could, leaving none for herself.

"But you have nothing yourself!" said Harry, who was distributing the small supply.

"Oh, I don't want anything," said Miss Grey.

"Nor I either," said Harry; "I 'll give up my share."

"You 'd better not, Harry," said Miss Grey, with a smile of thanks; "you are young."

"Yes, and strong," said Harry, adding his small portion to the others. "I guess I can stand it if you can."

"Thank you, Harry; I don't know what I should do without you."

Then Miss Grey began her story, hoping to make the children forget their hunger. She took her cue from Harry's bear story and added harrowing incidents and thrilling experiences, as many as she could think of, trying to remember some of the stories of adventure she had read.

When the children got tired and began to be restless, she brought out her next resource: she proposed a game, and in a few minutes the whole school was romping and shouting

and enjoying the novelty of a real play in the schoolroom.

When at last they sat down warm and breathless, she began again. This time she sang them some songs; some that she remembered her mother singing to her in the nursery. But she found this a rather dangerous experiment, for the thought of that happy time contrasted with the anxieties of this, with a dozen frightened children on her hands, cut off from all the world, nearly overcame her. But she rallied again, and this time proposed a song that all could sing.

After that she told another story, making it as long and as stirring as she possibly could.

By this time it was quite dark so that the stove-door was left open to give a little light, and the younger ones began to cry quietly with sleepiness.

All the children were sent to the hall to bring their wraps, and then beginning with the smallest, they were all put to bed on the benches. These benches, fortunately, had backs, and by putting two of them face to

face they made a bed, which, if hard and cheerless, would certainly keep them from falling out.

When the last one had been made as comfortable as could be done under the circumstances, Miss Grey sang several rather sleepy verses, and when long breathing announced the sleep of some, she sank back in her chair exhausted.

"I 'll keep the fire going, Miss Grey," said her gallant helper, Harry. "You try to sleep, or at least to rest."

"Indeed, Harry, I could n't sleep if I tried. You know about these storms — how long do they usually last? Do you suppose some one will come for us?"

"Why, Miss Grey," said Harry, "I suppose every man in the village is out now trying to get to us — surely every man who has a child in school."

"I suppose every mother is half crazy," said Miss Grey.

"No doubt she is," said Harry.

Now when all was quiet inside the room,

Miss Grey had leisure to listen to the rage of the elements outside. How the savage wind roared and beat upon the lonely little building as if it would tear it to pieces and scatter its ruins over the pitiless prairie; how the icy storm beat against the staring great windows as if in its fury it would crash them in and bury them all. It was fearful, and Miss Grey, unused to storms of such violence, shuddered as she listened.

"Harry," she whispered with white lips, "is n't this the worst storm you ever knew? It seems as if it must blow the house down."

"No," said Harry, "I think they're all about alike. I was caught out in one once."

"Were you? Did you get lost?"

"Oh, yes indeed; my father was with me and we wandered around, it seemed for hours, till we saw a light and got to a farmhouse, miles away from where we thought we were. I was so stiff with cold I could n't walk. I was a kid then" — he hastily added, "and my father had to carry me to the house. He froze his ears and his nose that time."

"Well, this is the most awful storm I ever

knew," said Miss Grey. "I feel now as if I should run away from this place as soon as my term is up."

"Don't," said Harry earnestly; "you're the best teacher we ever had — don't go away!"

For some time not much was said between the two watchers. The children — most of them — slept.

"Harry," said Miss Grey, after a while, "you didn't answer my question of how long these storms usually last."

Harry looked a little confused, for he had purposely not answered it, fearing to discourage her.

"Sometimes," he said, hesitatingly, "it is over in a few hours, but sometimes," he added more slowly, "one has lasted two or three days."

"Oh!" cried Miss Grey in horror, "what can I do with the children! They'll be hungry as bears when they wake!"

"Oh, they'll surely find us as soon as morning comes," said Harry. "I wish we could show a light now; they might be right on us and not see us."

"That's true — but there's no possible way of making one. We ought to have candles and matches, and I 'll see that we have — if we ever get out of this," she added, in a lower tone.

After what seemed interminable hours, daylight began to creep through the windows. It gave little hope, for the wind was strong as ever, and nothing could be seen but a world of whirling, rushing, blinding snow. And before it was fully light the children began to wake; soon they were all awake and most of them crying with hunger and fright.

Then the scenes of the afternoon were repeated. The worn-out teacher sang and told stories, and led in games till she was ready to drop with exhaustion.

About noon a shout startled them, and Harry rushed to the door; indeed all started for it in a mad rush, but Miss Grey ordered them back so sternly that they obeyed.

In a moment the room was full of men — or were they some strange snow-monsters? — clad in white from head to foot, and so dis-

guised by the snow that no child could know his own father.

With joy and relief, Miss Grey almost fainted, while the men, after assuring themselves that all the children were safe, listened to Harry's animated story of the terrible night, and then applauded Miss Grey for her heroic labors.

She did not look heroic now, for she had sunk back in her chair almost as white as the world outside the windows. When the weary men had rested a little and warmed themselves, the children were wrapped up in extra wraps the men had brought, and Miss Grey rallied and prepared to set out on her fight for life, through the still raging storm.

They had made some sort of a path through the drifts as they came, and though little signs of it were left, there was enough to guide these hardy men used to such storms. Every man took his child in his arms and all started out, Miss Grey under the care of her faithful Harry.

At first she clung to his arm, but the snow

was everywhere; it filled her eyes and took away her breath, the wind blew her skirts and impeded her steps, and in her state of nervous exhaustion she was very soon overcome. A dull stupor came over her, and, letting go her hold on the arm of her protector, she sank down into the snow unconscious.

From that state she would never have roused but for the efforts of Harry. There was not a moment to lose; the rest of the party were almost out of sight, and to lose them would be to be without a guide in this wilderness of snow.

It was no time for ceremony. With a hasty "You must excuse me, then," Harry took her light form up in his arms and trudged on as well as he could, striving only to keep the men in sight.

When, after efforts that tried his strength to its limits, he reached the farmhouse where Miss Grey boarded, he staggered up the steps, burst open the door, and almost fell on the floor with his unconscious burden.

The family rushed to his aid; took Miss

Grey's limp form, laid it on a lounge, and some set to work to restore her, while others helped Harry to free himself from snow and thaw himself out.

When, after some time, Miss Grey was fully recovered, and both she and Harry had eaten a very welcome breakfast, he rose to go to his own home not far away, she rose, too, and said earnestly: —

"Harry, I don't know what to say! I believe you have saved my life — what can I say — what can I ever do" —

"Promise that you won't give up the school and go away!" burst eagerly from Harry's lips.

"Do you really care so much to have me stay?" she asked, somewhat surprised, for she had sometimes been obliged to assert her authority very sternly.

"Yes, I do!" he said, bluntly. "I — I" — he went on embarrassed, "I've been a donkey and given you trouble — I'd like to kick myself — but you're a brick and I'll behave myself — if you'll stay."

"I will," said Miss Grey cordially, "and I depend on you to be the help you were last night. I might never" — here she broke down.

"You 'll see," said Harry bluntly, as he opened the door to go.

She did. He was better than his word, for he seemed to have shaken off all his boyishness from that terrible day. He not only attended to his studies, but he became her aid and assistant on all occasions, and his example as well as his influence made the little school far different from what it had been. Before spring, Miss Grey had become so attached to her scholars and the little town that she had no wish to leave them. She, however, learned to see in time the coming of a storm and she provided herself with the means of getting help, so that she was never again made prisoner with a roomful of children by a blizzard.

"Mamma," said Kristy, after a few moments' silence, "why did you never tell me anything about that Bessie before?"

Mamma smiled. "I did n't want to tell you everything at once; I wanted to save some till you were a little older."

"I guess there 's another reason, too," said Kristy, looking very wise; "I guess they are about some one I know." Mamma smiled again, but said nothing for a moment till Kristy began again.

"Tell me another."

"Well; let me see," said Mrs. Crawford. "I don't think of anything else interesting that happened to Bessie while she was in the city, and soon after the affair of the dead kitten she went home. But I remember another thing that happened about that time which I will tell you after lunch."

"Oh, tell it now!" demanded Kristy, looking at the clock which pointed to ten minutes after twelve.

"Well; perhaps there is time," said her mother.

CHAPTER V

MOLLY'S SECRET ROOM

When Molly was a little girl eight or ten years old, she was living in the city with her two sisters who took care of her.

They had no father or mother, and the sisters were clerks in a store, for they had to support themselves. They lived in one room, high up in a business block, so as to be near their work, which was indeed in the very next building.

They had to go to work early in the morning and leave Molly alone. They had lived in the country, and it was very hard for the child to be shut up in one room all day, with no one to play with, and only back windows to look out of.

Once or twice Molly had left the room and wandered into the street, and the sisters were so afraid she would be lost that finally they

locked the door and took away the key so that she could not get out.

Playing all alone with her dolls became very tiresome after a while, and looking out of the window was not very exciting; there was nothing to be seen but back yards of stores where nothing ever happened.

Now Molly noticed that the next building, which was lower than the one they were in, was a little deeper than theirs, and stuck out a foot or so beyond it. One of their windows was quite near this roof which was flat, and Molly often looked longingly at it, wishing she could get out upon it and be out of doors.

One day when she was very tired and warm, she stood at the window looking at the tempting roof so near, when suddenly the thought came to her that she could almost step from the window on to it. This was an enticing thought, and without thinking of the danger of falling, or of anything except the longing to get out, she pushed the window as high as it would go, climbed up on the sill, and hold-

ing fast to the casing inside, thrust one foot carefully out. Oh, joy! she touched the roof, and with one fearful step was safely on it, though her heart beat a little hard.

The sun shone brightly, and she was almost too happy to look about to see her new possessions. The roof was flat, as large as a big room; on one side was a tall brick chimney and in the middle a queer-looking structure which she at once went over to examine. It was shaped like a tent, and all made of windows which she could not see through because they were of colored glass.

Both sides of this roof-room were tall, brick walls of neighboring buildings, and in the front a lower one, which was, however, too high for her to look over. Only the back was open.

It was not a very attractive place, but to Molly it was a new world. She was a strange child always, full of imagination, and she at once decided that the brick chimney was a castle in which some children were shut up, and the window tent looked into a garden where they were allowed to play.

She resolved to bring her doll out here, and she thought she should never be lonely again if she could only find a peep-hole in that glass roof and look down into the garden; so she was always looking for one.

After that day she spent all her time—when it did not rain—on the delightful roof. She carried her treasures out, her whole family of dolls with their furniture and things, her sisters keeping her well supplied so that she should not be lonely. She found a small box which she could leave out there, and made her a nice seat, and soon she began to get rosy and happy again, to the great delight of her sisters.

Every day, as soon as she was left alone, she pushed up the window, took that fearful step on which, if she had slipped or lost her hold, she would have been dashed to pieces on the pavement below, and then spent the day happily with her dolls and toys, making stories for herself.

It was not long before she found the peep-hole she was always looking for into the room

under the glass tent — for it was a room, and not a garden, as she hoped. This peep-hole was a small three-cornered piece of clear glass among the colored, and through it she could see everything in the room below.

The room was not particularly interesting, but she made up a story about it as she always did. It seemed to be a gentleman's office, for an elderly gentleman nearly always sat at a table under the roof-window and had papers about him.

To him came many callers; sometimes other men, sometimes shop-boys, now and then a shop-girl on some errand, and once a week a charwoman who cleaned, and swept, and dusted, and piled the papers neatly up on the table.

All this was of deepest interest to Molly, who passed hours every day looking into this room, her only outlook into the world, and making up stories about the people who came.

Sometimes — not very often — there came a beautiful lady to the room, who had long talks with the old gentleman, and seemed to

be unhappy about something. She would cry, and appeared to be begging him to do something which he never did, though he seemed to be sorry for her. Molly had made up a story about her: that she was the daughter of the old gentleman and wanted to go to live in the country where there were trees, and birds, and gardens, and her father always refused to let her, but kept her shut up in a big brick house in the city.

One day while peering down into the room, Molly saw the beautiful lady, after much talk, take out of her bag a small leather case and open it. There was something very glittering inside, which flashed bright colors as she turned it. Molly was so interested that she could not take her eyes off her. After a while she gave it to the old gentleman, who unlocked a drawer in the table, put into it the case with its wonderful treasure, and then took from the same drawer a small bag, out of which he counted what Molly thought were bright, new pennies, such big pennies, too, as the pennies were at that time, so shining and

beautiful that Molly wished she had a handful to play with. These he gathered up and gave to the lady who put them carefully into her bag and then went away.

Now for many days the lady did not come again, and Molly saw only the errand-boys and occasionally a shop-girl, and the men who came to talk, and always the old gentleman, till one day something else happened.

The old gentleman was away all day and the charwoman was cleaning the room. One or two persons came, apparently to see the old gentleman, and among the rest one of the shop-girls Molly had often seen there. She talked with the cleaning-woman a few minutes, and then, the work being done, they went out together.

While Molly still looked, hoping they would come back, she saw a boy steal in very quietly. She knew him for one she had often seen there; he seemed to belong to the store below. But he acted very strangely. He looked all around the room carefully, opened a door at the back, then locked the door he had come in at.

Then he went to the table — all the time listening and acting as if afraid. He acted so strangely that Molly was so much interested she could n't look away. She wondered what he was going to do. She soon saw, for he took from his pocket a bunch of keys and began trying them in the drawer of the table.

He tried several, and at last found one that fitted and he pulled the drawer open. He tumbled over the things in the drawer, took out the little bag which had held the bright pennies, put it in his pocket, and then pulled out the small leather case Molly remembered so well, and she saw — as he opened it — the same flashing colors she had seen before. This he hastily closed and slipped into another pocket. Then snatching his keys, he hurried out of the room, leaving the drawer open, but shutting the door very quietly.

Meanwhile Molly was breathless with excitement over this new mystery and could hardly tear herself away from her peep-hole, hoping always to see what would happen next.

She soon saw unusual things. The next day policemen came to the room, examined the drawer carefully, looked at doors and windows, as if seeking something. The old gentleman seemed distressed, and the lady came and cried and wrung her hands; plainly there was something very serious the matter.

One evening — not long after this — she heard her sisters talking about a mysterious robbery that had taken place in the store. The proprietors of the store had lost money and a valuable piece of diamond jewelry, and one of the shop-girls had been arrested. She was the only one who had been in the room that day, it was said by the charwoman who was first suspected. The sisters were very indignant over the arrest; they did not believe the girl was guilty.

While listening to this story, Molly understood that her show-room was the private office of the old gentleman and that she knew who had stolen the diamonds. But if she told, it would reveal the secret of her play-

room, and she knew her sisters would never let her go there again.

The lonely child felt that she could not give up her only pleasure; so she sat listening but saying nothing, till one of her sisters told about the poor shop-girl, how she was in great distress, and her mother, who was almost helpless, had come to the store to plead with the old gentleman.

This was too much for kind-hearted Molly, and on one of her sisters saying she did not believe the girl stole it, Molly exclaimed, before she thought: —

"She did n't! the shop-boy took it!"

"How do you know?" demanded her sister in amazement.

"I saw him; I know all about it," said Molly excitedly.

"You saw it?" said her sister. "What do you mean? How could you see it?"

Surprised as they were, Molly was a truthful child, and she was so earnest that her sisters could not doubt she did know something, though they could not imagine how. A little

questioning, however, brought the facts to light, and Molly's long-treasured secret was out. She showed her sisters how she got on to the roof, and they were forced to believe her.

After talking it over, they decided it was too serious a matter for them to manage, and the next morning, asking to see the store manager, they quietly told him Molly's story.

He poohed at it, said it was impossible; but upon their insisting, he at last brought them before the old gentleman.

He was struck with their straightforward story, and impossible as it seemed, was resolved to test it. Molly was sent for and told so straight a story of the beautiful lady and the shining jewel, of the bright pennies he gave her, and of other things she had seen, that a visit was made to the attic room.

Molly took her fearful step on to the roof in an easy way that showed it was perfectly familiar, followed by the manager, who was a slight man. She showed him the peep-hole and how she could see everything in the

room below, and he returned in almost speechless amazement.

The next thing was to pick out the boy who had done it, and this Molly had to do, though she would not have consented except for her pity for the shop-girl now shut up in jail.

All the boys of the store were made to stand up in line, and Molly was told to pick out the boy. It did not need her word, however, for the guilty boy turned red and white, and at last fell at the feet of the old gentleman and confessed all.

That was a time of triumph for the sisters: first they received — to their amazement — the five hundred dollars reward which had been offered, and then they were given better places in the store at much higher wages, and Molly was adopted by the beautiful lady whose valuable jewels she had been the means of recovering.

The sisters hated to give Molly up, but seeing the great benefit it would be for her, they consented. With the money they bought a

tiny home in a country suburb, and came every day to their work on the cars. There they live nicely now, and Molly often goes to see them. They have been advanced to fine positions and are prosperous and happy.

When the story was ended, Kristy drew a long sigh. "That was splendid! was it true? How I should like to see Molly's play-room."

"Yes, it is true; but you can never see it," said her mother, "for the next year the store was built up a story or two higher, and the play-house on the roof was no more."

"There's the lunch bell," said Kristy, "will you tell me some more after lunch?"

"Dear me, Kristy," said her mother, with a sigh, "you are certainly incorrigible; don't you *ever* get tired of stories?"

"Never!" said Kristy emphatically; "I could listen to stories all day and all night too, I guess."

Mrs. Crawford hesitated; Kristy went on.

"Won't you tell me stories as long as it rains?"

"Well, yes," began Mrs. Crawford, who had noted signs of clearing. But Kristy interrupted, shouting, "It's a bargain! it's a bargain! you said yes! Now let's go to lunch; I'm in a hurry to begin the next story."

"Well," said Mrs. Crawford, when they returned to the sitting-room after lunch, "if I'm to tell stories all day, you certainly should do something, too; it isn't fair for me to do all the work."

"I will," said Kristy laughing; "I'll listen."

"Do you call that work?" asked her mother.

"N–o!" said Kristy, thinking a moment. "Well, I'll tell you! I'll get my knitting;" and she ran out of the room and in a minute or two came back with some wool and needles with a very little strip of knitting, all done up in a clean towel. She had set out to knit a carriage-blanket for a baby she was fond of, but she found it slow work, for as soon as she became interested in anything else the knitting was forgotten. Now she took her seat in a low chair and began to knit. "Now

begin," she said, as her mother took up her sewing.

"Did I ever tell you, Kristy, how I learned to knit?"

"No," said Kristy; "I suppose your mother taught you."

"She did not. I was taught by my grandmother, my father's mother, one winter that I spent with her, when my mother was ill."

"Was n't your grandmother very queer?" asked Kristy. "Did she look like that picture in your room?"

"Yes; that 's a good likeness, but she was n't exactly queer. She was a very fine woman, but she had decided notions about the way girls should be brought up, and she thought my mother was too easy. So when she had the whole care of me, she set herself to give me some good, wholesome training."

"Poor little mamma!" said Kristy. "What did she do? It seems so funny to think of you as a little girl being trained!"

"Well, it was not at all funny, I assure you. I thought I was terribly abused, and

I used to make plans to run away some night and go home. But every night I was so sleepy that I put it off till another night; and indeed I had a bit of common sense left, and realized that I had no money and did not know the way home, and could n't walk so far anyway; though I did run away once" —

"Oh, tell me about that" — cried Kristy, laughing; "you run away! how funny! tell me!"

"I'll tell you the story of my naughty runaway, but first I must tell you about my grandmother and why I wanted to run away."

CHAPTER VI

HOW MAMMA RAN AWAY

My mother was not a very strong woman, while I was a healthy strong girl, so when she tried to teach me to knit and sew, I always managed to get out of it, and she was too weak to insist. So when I went to my grandmother's to spend the winter, and her first question was, "What sewing have you on hand now?" I was struck with horror.

"Why none" — I stammered, and seeing the look of surprise in her face, I hastened to add, "I never have any on hand."

"Do you never sew?" she asked, in her sternest tone.

"Why — not very often," I faltered. "I don't like to sew."

"Hm!" said my grandmother, "I shall have to teach you then; I am surprised! ten years old and not know how to sew! At your

age, your Aunt Emily was almost an expert needlewoman; she could do overhand, hemming, felling, backstitching, hemstitching, running, catstitching, buttonholes, and a little embroidery."

I was aghast. Had I got to learn all these mysteries of the needle! My grandmother went on.

"We'll begin at the beginning then; I'll prepare some patchwork for you."

My heart sank; patchwork was the thing my mother had tried to have me do, and I hated it. I remember now some mussed up, dirty-looking blocks, stuffed behind a bureau at home — to have them lost.

True to her word, my grandmother brought out her "piece-bag" and selected a great pile of bits of colored calico and new white cotton cloth, which she cut into neat blocks about four inches square, and piled up on the table, the white pieces by themselves, the pink and the blue in separate piles, and the gray and dull colored also by themselves.

Then taking needle and thread, she began

basting them for sewing, a white and colored one together. Oh, what a pile there was of basted pieces, ready for me to learn overhand, or "over 'n over" as I used to call it. I thought there was enough for a quilt. Should I have to sew it all? I was in despair. But my grandmother was much pleased with the show. "There!" she said, "when you finish those, I shall prepare some more, and if you are industrious, you will have enough for a quilt by spring, and then I will have a quilting and you can take home to your mother a sample of the work you have done."

Somehow this picture did not allure me. I thought only of the weary, weary hours of sewing I should have to do.

Well, that very day she sent to the store and had a thimble bought for me, and that afternoon after school I began my quilt under her eye. I must have a regular "stint," she said, and it was to be — at first — one of those dreadful blocks, at least four inches of over-and-over stitches! This was to be done the

first thing after school, before I could go out to play.

I won't tell you of the tears I shed over those blocks, of the bad stitches I had to pick out and do over, of the many times I had to go and wash my hands because of dirty thread. I thought my grandmother the most cruel taskmaster in the world.

And the patchwork was not all. When she found that I could not even knit, and that I was accustomed at home to read all the long winter evenings before my bedtime at eight, she said at once that so much reading was not good for me, and I must have some knitting. So she had some red yarn bought, and some steel needles, and "set up" a stocking big enough for my little brother, cheering me, as she thought, by telling me that if I paid proper attention to it, I could knit a pair of stockings for him before spring. My evening "stint" was six times around the stocking-leg.

These two tasks, which my grandmother never failed to exact from me, made life a bur-

den to me. How I hated them! how naughty I was! How I used to break my needles and lose my spool of thread, and ravel my knitting to make a diversion in the dreary round, forgetting that all these hindrances only prolonged my hours of labor, for every stitch of my task must be finished before she would release me.

I brooded over my hardships till I became really desperate, and so was in a fit state to agree to a plan proposed by a schoolmate — to run away. She too had troubles at home; her mother made her help in the housework; she had to wash dishes when she wanted to play out of doors.

We compared notes and made up our minds that we were persecuted and abused, and we would n't stand it any longer. We were not quite so silly as to think of a serious runaway, but we wanted to get rid of our tasks for one day at least; and besides it was spring now and the woods were full of flowers, which I loved, next to books, best of anything in the world.

So after school one day we started for the

woods instead of for home. We felt very brave and grown-up when we turned into the path that led into the woods, but before the afternoon was over our feelings changed, and we began to feel very wicked, and to dread going home. I thought of my grandmother's sharp eyes fixed on me, and dreaded what punishment she might inflict, for I knew she believed in punishments that terrified me, such as doubling my daily task, shutting up in a dark closet, and even, I feared, the rod.

Moreover my fault was made worse by the fact that I had lost my schoolbooks which I was taking home for the study-hour in the morning. I had laid them down on a log and was unable to find them again, though we spent hours — it seemed to me — in looking for them.

We did not enjoy our freedom after all, for the sense of guilt and dread took all the pleasure out of everything; besides, we had one great fright. We heard some great animal rustling among the bushes and were sure it was a bear. We turned and fled, running

as hard as we could, looking fearfully back to see if we were pursued, stumbling over logs, and tearing our clothes on bushes. I lost one shoe in a muddy place, and Jenny lost her sunbonnet.

We picked flowers, and when the frail things wilted in our hot hands, we threw them away, and not till it began to grow dark did we get up courage to turn towards the village.

The piece of woods was not large, and we did not really get lost, and before it was quite dark, two very tired, shamefaced girls, with torn dresses and generally disreputable looks, stole into the back doors of their respective homes.

I never knew what happened to Jenny — she never would tell me; but I met the stern face of my grandmother the moment I stepped into the kitchen. I had tried to slip in and go to my room to wash and brush myself, and try to mend my dress before she saw me, but the moment I entered, her eye was upon me.

After one look of utter horror, she seized

me by the shoulders, and walked me into the sitting-room, where the family were gathered, — my uncle who lived with my grandmother, and my three cousins, all older, and not playmates for me.

She left me standing in the middle of the room, while all eyes were turned in reproof upon me.

"There!" said my grandmother, in her most severe voice, "there 's the child who runs away! Look at her."

Then my uncle began to question me. Where had I been? where was my shoe? how did I tear my dress? what did I do it for? what did I think I deserved? and various other questions. Before long, I was weeping bitterly, and feeling that imprisonment for life would be a fitting punishment for my crimes.

Then came my sentence in the stern voice of my grandmother: "I think a suitable punishment for a naughty girl will be to go to bed without her supper." This was assented to by my uncle, and I was sent off in disgrace, to go to bed.

Now I had a healthy young appetite, and the long tramp had made me very hungry, so that the punishment — though very mild for my offense — seemed to me almost worse than anything.

I was tired enough, however, to fall asleep, but after some hours I awoke, ravenous with hunger. All was still in the house, and I knew the family must have gone to bed. A long time I lay tossing and tumbling and getting more restless and hungry every minute.

At last I could stand it no longer, and I crept out of bed and carefully opened the door — my room was off the kitchen. The last flickering remains of the fire on the hearth made it light enough to see my way about.

Softly I crept to the pantry, hoping to find something left from supper; but my grandmother's maid was well trained, and I found nothing; the cookie jar, too, was empty, for tomorrow was baking-day. I was about turning back in despair when my eyes fell on a row of milk pans, which I knew were full of milk.

The shelf was too high for me to reach comfortably, but I thought I could draw a pan down enough to drink a little from it, and not disturb anything. So I raised myself on tiptoe and carefully drew it towards me.

You can guess what happened; and if I had known more I should have expected it. As soon as I got the pan over the edge the milk swayed towards me, the pan escaped from my hands, and fell with terrific clatter on the floor, deluging me with milk from head to foot.

Terrified out of my wits, I fled to my room, jumped into bed, covered my head with the bedclothes, and lay there panting. There was a moment's silence, and then my grandmother's voice, —

"What was that? What has happened?" and my uncle's answer, "I 'll bring a light and see."

Alas! a light revealed wet milk tracks across the kitchen, leading to my room. In a minute it was opened by my grandmother, who drew me out into the kitchen, and stood me up on the hearth — uttering not a word.

I was utterly crushed; I expected I knew not what, but something more than I could guess, and to my uncle's "Why did you do it, child?" I could only gasp out with bursts of frantic tears, "I was so hungry!"

My grandmother, still silent, hastened to get me dry clothes, then left me standing on the warm hearth, sobbing violently, and feeling more and more guilty, as I saw what trouble I had made.

Then she got clean sheets and made up my bed afresh. While she was doing this, my uncle went in and spoke to her very low. But I think I must have heard or guessed that he said my sentence had been too severe, and I was not so much to blame for trying to get a simple drink of milk, for when my grandmother came out, went into the pantry and brought me a slice of bread and butter, I was not surprised, but fell upon it like a half-starved creature.

Then I was sent to bed again, and it being nearly morning, the maid was called up, and I heard her scrubbing the floor and reducing the

kitchen to its usual condition of shining neatness.

I never tried to run away again; my grandmother never scolded me, but my shame as I put on the new shoes and took the new schoolbooks was punishment enough. I tried harder after that to please my grandmother, and really learned a good deal of sewing, and could knit beautifully before I went home.

"Poor little mamma!" said Kristy, as her mother paused, "you did n't have much fun, did you? I can just fancy how you looked, all dripping with milk. Tell me another."

"Well, I 'll tell you something that happened to Jenny soon after that. Jenny had often told me about an old aunt she had, whom she and her two cousins used to go to see very often. She wanted me to go with her sometimes, but I did n't know her aunt, and I was shy, and did n't like to visit strangers, so I never went."

CHAPTER VII

HOW AUNT BETTY MADE HER CHOICE

One morning three cousins were walking slowly down the village street towards the house of their Aunt Betty, where they had been invited to dine. They were eager and excited, for there was something peculiar about the invitation, though none but Jenny knew exactly what it was. Jenny began: —

"Well, I do wonder who 'll get it!"

"Get what?" asked Grace.

"Why, don't you know? Didn't your mother tell you?" said Jenny, in surprise. "Aunt Betty didn't mean to have us know, but mamma told me."

"I don't know what you mean," said Grace.

"Nor I," put in Ruth.

"Why," said Jenny eagerly, "you know Aunt Betty has not been so well lately, and

her doctor says she must have some one to live with her besides old Sam, and she's made up her mind — mamma says — to take one of us three and give her all the advantages she can while she lives, and leave her something when she dies. Mamma says, probably her whole fortune, or at any rate a big share. It's a grand chance! I do hope she'll take me!"

"But," said Ruth, "I don't understand; why should she leave everything to one, after spending so much on her?"

"Oh, to make up to her for giving up so much," said Jenny. "She's so cranky, you know!"

"It won't be much fun to live with her," said Grace thoughtfully. "But think of the advantages! I'd have all the music lessons I want, and I'm sure she'd let me go to concerts and operas. Oh! Oh!"

"I'm not so sure of that," said Jenny. "She would n't want you going out much; for my part I'd coax her to travel; I'd love to go all over the world — and I'm just dying to go to Europe, anyway."

"What would you choose, Ruth?" asked Grace.

"I don't know," answered Ruth slowly, "and it's no use to wish, for of course she won't choose me. I don't think she ever cared much for me, and I do make such stupid blunders. It seems as if I was bound to break something or knock over something, or do *something* she particularly dislikes every time I go there. You know the last time I went there I stumbled over a stool and fell flat on the floor, making her nearly jump out of her skin — as she said — and getting a big, horrid-looking bump on my forehead."

The girls laughed. "You do seem to be awfully unlucky, Ruth," said Jenny magnanimously, "and I guess the choice will be one of us two."

"Well, here we are!" said Grace, in a low tone, as they reached the gate of the pretty cottage where Aunt Betty lived. "Now for it! Put on your best manners, Ruthie, and try not to upset the old lady's nerves, whatever you do!"

"I shall be sure to do it," said Ruth sadly, "I'm so awkward."

Grace and Jenny laughed, not displeased with the thought that the choice would be only between two.

These three girls, so eager to leave their parents and live with Aunt Betty, had comfortable homes, all of them; but in each case there were brothers and sisters and a family purse not full enough to gratify all their desires. Aunt Betty had always been ready to help them out of any difficulty; to give a new dress or a new hat when need became imperative, or a little journey when school work had tired them. So she had come to be the source of many of their comforts and all their luxuries. To live with Aunt Betty, so near their own homes that they would scarcely be separated from them, seemed to them the greatest happiness they could hope for.

Old Sam, the colored servant who had lived with Miss Betty, as he called her, since she was a young woman, and was devoted to her, opened the door for them, a broad grin on his comely face.

"Miss Betty, she 's a-lookin' fur you-all," he said; "you 're to take off your things in the hall."

"Why! Can't we go into the bedroom as usual?" asked Grace, who liked a mirror and a brush to make sure that every curl was in place.

"No, Miss Grace," said Sam, "y'r aunt said fur you to take 'em off here."

Rather sulkily, Grace did as she was bid, and then, bethinking herself of the importance of the occasion, she called up her usual smile, and the three entered the sitting-room where their aunt awaited them.

Aunt Betty was a pleasant-faced lady of perhaps sixty years, but though rather infirm so that she walked with a cane, she was bright and cheery-looking. She was dressed in her usual thick black satin gown and lace mitts, with a fine lace kerchief around her neck and crossed on her breast, and a string of fine gold beads around her throat.

The few moments before Sam opened the door of the dining-room, clad in snowy apron

and white gloves, and announced in his most dignified butler's manner, "Dinner is served!" were passed by Aunt Betty in asking about the three families of her guests, and soon all were seated at the pretty round table, set out with the very best old china, of which every piece was more precious than gold, with exquisite cut glass and abundance of silver. This was an unusual honor, and the girls were surprised.

"You see, nieces," said Aunt Betty, "this is a special occasion, and I give you my very best."

"This china's almost too lovely to use," said Grace warmly. "I don't know as I shall dare to touch it!"

"It's all beautiful!" said Jenny eagerly; "I do love to eat off dainty dishes. Did Sam arrange the table?"

"Yes," said Aunt Betty, "Sam did everything."

"Well, he's just a wonder!" said Grace. "I wish we could ever have a table like this in our house — but then we haven't any

such things to put on it," she added, with a sigh.

"I only hope," said Ruth ruefully, "that I shall not break anything. Auntie, you ought to have set me in a corner by myself with kitchen dishes to use; I deserve it for my clumsiness."

"Well, niece!" said Aunt Betty, with a rather anxious look, "I hope you 'll be on your good behavior to-day, for I value every piece above gold."

"I know you do," said Ruth anxiously, "and that 's what scares me."

While they were talking, Sam had served each one with a plate on which lay a small slice of fish, browned to perfection and temptingly hot. Each girl took a small taste, and then began picking at the food daintily with her fork, but not eating. Grace raised her napkin to her lips, and surreptitiously removed from her mouth the morsel she had taken. Jenny heroically swallowed, and then hastily drank from her glass, while Ruth quietly took the morsel from her mouth, deposited it on her plate, and took no more.

Aunt Betty apparently did not observe all this, but in a moment, seeing that they were toying with the food on their plates, asked quietly, "What's the matter? Why do you not eat?"

"I don't care much for fish," said Grace, in her most polite manner, and, "I beg your pardon, aunt," said Jenny, in apparent confusion, "but I must confess to having had some candy this morning, and I'm afraid I haven't much appetite; the fish is fine, I'm sure."

"And you, Ruth?" asked her aunt.

Ruth hesitated.

"I want the truth, niece," Aunt Betty went on; "you know I always want the honest truth."

"Indeed, Aunt Betty," began Grace, "I'm sure" — She paused, and Jenny broke in, "I'm awfully sorry, Aunt Betty" — But Ruth, while a deep blush rose to her honest face, said in a low tone, "Auntie — I'm sorry to have to tell you — but I think the fish had been kept a little too long."

Jenny and Grace looked at her in amazement, expecting some burst of indignation from Aunt Betty.

But she only said quietly, though a queer look stole over her face, "Then we'll have it removed," touching a bell as she spoke.

Sam appeared instantly, his broad, black face shining, and a grin he could not wholly repress displaying his white teeth.

In a moment he removed the fish and replaced it with the next course, which was turkey, roasted in Sam's superb way, which no one in the village could equal. This was all right, and received full justice from the youthful appetites, even Jenny forgetting that candy had spoiled hers.

After this the dinner progressed smoothly till ice cream was served with dessert. Again something seemed to be out of joint. Aunt Betty noticed that her young guests did not show their usual fondness for this dish. Again she asked, "Is anything wrong with the cream?" and again she was answered with bland apologies, though some confusion.

"I've eaten so much," said Grace, with a sigh.

"It's so cold it makes me shiver," said Jenny, laying down her spoon.

"And what ails you, Ruth?" asked Aunt Betty, with a grave look on her face.

"I'm afraid" — said Ruth timidly, "I'm really afraid Sam spilled some salt in it, auntie;" and so embarrassed was she at being obliged to say what she was sure would be a mortal offense, that in her confusion she knocked a delicate glass off the table, and it was shattered to pieces on the floor.

"Oh, dear!" she cried, "I've done it now! Auntie, you'll never forgive me! I don't know what ails me when I get among your precious things."

"I know," said her aunt grimly. "I believe you are a little afraid of me, my dear, and that makes you awkward. Never mind the glass," as Ruth was picking up the pieces, tears rolling down her face, "that can be replaced; it is only the china that is precious; don't cry, child."

Ruth tried to dry her tears, but she was really much grieved, and her cousins exchanged a look which said plainly as words, "That settles *her* chance!"

If Aunt Betty saw the look, she did not mention it, but she soon made the move to leave the table, and all gladly followed her into the other room.

"Nieces," she said, before they had seated themselves, "did you wonder why I had you leave your wraps in the hall today?"

"It was, of course, unusual," said Grace, "for we have always gone into the bedroom, but it did not matter in the least."

"It did not make any difference," murmured Jenny.

"I will show you what I have been doing to the bedroom," said Aunt Betty, throwing open the door to that room.

It had been entirely transformed. In place of the old-fashioned set of furniture, the gorgeous flowered carpet, the dark walls and thick curtains that had been in the room ever since they could remember, were light-tinted

walls, hard wood floors, with several rugs, a modern light set of furniture, pictures on the walls, lace curtains at the windows, all the latest style and very elegant. One thing only made a discord: over the dainty bed was spread a gay-colored cover. It disfigured the whole effect, but the girls apparently saw nothing out of the way.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Jenny.

"It 's so dainty and sweet!" put in Grace. "Auntie, you have exquisite taste."

Ruth looked her appreciation till her glance fell upon the bedspread; then she hesitated.

"Nieces, do you like it? Could you suggest any change in it?"

"It is simply perfect as it is," said Grace warmly, while not to be outdone by Grace, Jenny added with a sigh, "Nothing could improve it, I 'm sure."

Aunt Betty looked at Ruth, who was covered with confusion, but she stammered, "I seem to be the only one to find fault to-day, but indeed, auntie — if you want my honest opinion" —

"I do," said Aunt Betty, with a smile.

"Well then — could n't you — couldn't you put on a white spread instead of that gay one? That does n't seem to suit the beautiful room."

Aunt Betty smiled again. "Take it off, then, and let 's see!"

Ruth pulled off the spread, and there under it was a dainty lace one as exquisite as the rest of the room.

"I guess we 'll keep it off," said Aunt Betty, "though Jenny and Grace seem to like it well enough ; it certainly is an improvement."

Aunt Betty's manner was so peculiar as she said this, that the two girls who had sacrificed truthfulness to please her, began to suspect that there was more in it than they had thought; they were both rather silent when they returned to the sitting-room and Aunt Betty began: —

"Nieces, I have a little plan to tell you about, though possibly you may have suspected it" — with a sharp look at the two guilty ones.

"Perhaps you have heard that I have decided, by the advice of my physician, to take one of you to live with me — provided you and your parents are willing, of course. I shall ask a good deal of the one I select, but I shall try to make it up to her. I shall formally adopt her as my own, and, of course, make a distinction in her favor in my will. I shall ask a good deal of her time and attention; but I shall not live forever, and when I am gone, she will be independent, and able to make her own life."

The three girls were breathless with attention, and Aunt Betty went on.

"I want the one I shall choose to ponder these conditions well; there will be a few years — probably — of partial seclusion from society, and of devotion to her old auntie, and then freedom, with the consciousness of having made happy the declining years of one who buried the last of her own children many years ago."

She paused — but not a word was spoken — and in a moment she went on.

"I did not know how to choose between you, for you are all so sweet to me, so I made a plan to find out — with Sam's help — a little about your characteristics. The virtue I prize almost above all others, is — truthfulness, honest, outspoken truth. The bad fish, the salted cream, and the odious spread were tests, and only one of you stood the test and spoke the honest truth. I am glad that *one* did, for otherwise I should not have found, in my own family, one I could adopt and depend upon."

She paused; not a word was said.

"Ruth," she began again, turning to that confused, and blushing, and utterly amazed girl, "Ruth, will you come to live with me, take the place of a daughter, and occupy that room?"

"You ask *me*?" cried Ruth, "clumsy and awkward as I am! I never dreamed you could want me!"

"I know you did not," said Aunt Betty; "but your habit of truthfulness is far more valuable to me than the deftest fingers or the most finished manners. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" cried Ruth, falling on her knees and burying her face in Aunt Betty's lap, while happy tears fell from her eyes, and Aunt Betty gently stroked her hair.

"Well, well," said Jenny, with a sigh, as the two girls walked slowly home, "I always knew Aunt Betty was the crankiest woman in the world, and if Ruth was n't so perfectly sincere I should almost think that she" —

She paused, and Grace broke in.

"Yes; I 'm perfectly sure Ruth is not capable of putting on; besides, we always knew she could n't deceive to save her life."

"Hush," said mamma, as Kristy was about to speak. "Here comes Mrs. Wilson."

Mrs. Wilson, the next door neighbor, walked in, explaining that she had come in the rain because she was all alone in her house and was lonely, and seeing Mrs. Crawford sewing by the window, thought she would bring her work and join her.

Mrs. Crawford welcomed her, but Kristy was disturbed. "Mrs. Wilson," she began,

"don't you think a person ought to keep her promise?"

"Why, certainly," said Mrs. Wilson.

"Kristy! Kristy!" said her mother warningly.

"I'm just going to ask Mrs. Wilson," said Kristy, with a twinkle in her eye, "if she does n't think you ought to go on telling me stories, when you promised to do it as long as it rained. She likes to hear stories, too, I'm sure."

Mrs. Wilson laughed. "Of course I do, and I shall be delighted, I'm sure. Your mother must be a master hand at the business, for I never knew such a story-lover as you, Kristy."

"I've about told myself out," said Mrs. Crawford. "Kristy, I think you really ought to excuse me now."

"How will it do if I tell you one to rest mamma?" asked Mrs. Wilson. "I happen to be much interested just now in a story that is still going on in town."

"Do tell it!" said Kristy. "I can get mamma to keep her promise this evening."

Mrs. Wilson laughed, and first taking her sewing out of a bag she carried, she began: —

"It's about the Home we see on the cars, going to the city."

"Oh, yes! where we always see girls in the yard as we go by?" said Kristy.

"Yes; I'll tell you how it began."

Kristy settled herself more comfortably on the lounge, and the story began.

CHAPTER VIII

NORA'S GOOD LUCK

It does not seem very good in the beginning — but you shall see. One cold winter night a man in the city came home crazy with drink. I will not tell you what he did to his trembling daughter who was all the family left, except one thing: he put her out of the house and told her never to come back. It was a very poor house, hardly any comforts in it, but it was the only home the child knew and she was twelve years old. When she was turned out of it, her only thought was to hide herself away where no one could find her.

This was in the edge of the city, and she wandered about a little till she came to a new barn where there was an opening in the foundations big enough for her to crawl in. When she saw this, by the light of the street lamp, she crept into the hole and far back in one

corner where she thought no one would ever find her — and there she lay.

The house to which that barn belonged held two boys and a dog, and the next day, when the three were playing together, as they generally were, the dog began to act strangely. He smelled around that hole, then ran in, and barked and growled and seemed much excited.

"I guess there 's a cat in there," said one of the boys, calling the dog out. He came, but in a minute rushed back, and barked more and seemed to be pulling at something.

This aroused the curiosity of the boys, who got down by the opening and peered in. It was so dark that they could see nothing, but the dog refusing to come out, they went into the house and brought out a candle, and by the light of that, saw what looked like a bundle of rags, which, however, stirred a little as the dog tugged at it.

Then the boys called to her to come out; they threw sticks to see if she were alive; they tried all ways they could think of, and at last they went away. But soon they came back and

men with them. Nora, through half-shut eyes, could see them. She knew their blue coats and bright stars — they were policemen.

They called, they coaxed, they commanded, but she did not move. They found a boy small enough to crawl under the barn, and he went in. He found that she was alive, but she would not speak. Never a wish or a hope crossed the child's mind, except a wish to be let alone.

At last the boy, by the directions of the policemen, pulled her towards the opening. She did not resist — she did not know how to resist; her whole life had been a crushing submission to everything.

Finally the men could reach her, and the poor, little, half-dead figure was brought to the light.

"Poor soul!" said one of the men, almost tenderly. "She's near dead with cold and hunger."

She could not walk. Kind though rough hands carried her to the station house, where a warm fire and a few spoonfuls of broth — hastily procured from a restaurant — brought

her wholly back to life, and she sat up in her chair and faced a row of pitying faces with all her young misery.

Little by little her story was drawn from her.

But what to do with her — that was the question. She was not an offender against the law, and this institution was not for the protection of misfortune, but for the punishment of crime. They did the best they could. They fed her, made her a comfortable bed on a bench in the station house, and the next morning the whole story went into the papers.

This story was read by a lady of wealth over her morning coffee. She had lately been reading an account of the poor in our large cities, and had begun to think it was her duty to do something to help. With more money than she could use, and not a relative in the world, there was no reason why she should not make at least one child happy, and educate it for a useful life.

On reading the story of Nora, with the added statement that her father had been ar-

rested and placed in a retreat where he would not soon get out, the thought struck her that here was her chance to make the experiment.

After her breakfast, Miss Barnes ordered her carriage and went out. After driving about a little, she ordered her coachman to drive to the B — Street police station. He looked astonished, but of course obeyed, and in a short time, the dingy station house received an unusual visitor.

The moment Miss Barnes entered the room, she saw the child, and knew she was the one she had come to see. As for Nora, she had never seen a beautiful, happy-looking woman, and she could not take her eyes off her face.

Miss Barnes asked a few questions. Who was going to take her? Who were her friends? She learned that she had none, that her father had been arrested for vagrancy, and would be sent to the bridewell.

"Where is the child to go?" at last she asked.

"Indeed, ma'am, I don't know, unless she goes into the streets," said the policeman.

"I 'll take her," said Miss Barnes.

"It 'll be a heavenly charity if you do, ma'am," replied the man.

Miss Barnes turned to the girl.

"Nora, will you go with me?"

"Yes 'm," gasped Nora, with hungry soul looking out of her eyes.

"Come, then," said the lady shortly, leading the way out.

Thomas, holding the door of the carriage, was struck dumb with horror to see the apparition, but the timid little figure kept close to his mistress, and she wore such a look that the old servant dared not speak.

"To a respectable bath house," was Miss Barnes's order.

Thomas bowed, reached his seat somehow, and drove off.

"Not pretty, decidedly," thought Miss Barnes, looking steadily at the wondering face opposite hers, "but at least not coarse. Dress will improve her."

At the door of the bathing rooms, Thomas again threw open the carriage door. Miss

Barnes went in with Nora, gave her into the hands of the young woman in charge, with directions to have her thoroughly bathed and combed, and otherwise made ready for new clothes that she would bring.

The amazed young woman marched off with the unresisting Nora, and Miss Barnes went shopping. She bought a complete outfit, from hat to shoes, and in an hour returned to the bath rooms, to find Nora waiting. She was soon dressed, much to her own surprise, for she hardly knew the names of half the articles she had on, and they were once more in the carriage. As for Thomas, he thought wonders would never cease that morning.

As they rolled home, Miss Barnes said: —

"Now, Nora, you 're to live with me and be my girl. You 're not Nora Dennis; you 're Nora Barnes. You 're to forget your old life — at least as much as you can," she added, seeing a shade come over Nora's face. "And on no account are you to speak of it to the servants in my house. Do you understand?"

"Yes 'm," said Nora.

"I shall try to make your life happy," Miss Barnes went on a little more tenderly. "I shall educate you" —

"Please, ma'am, what 's that?" asked Nora timidly.

"Teach you to read and write," said Miss Barnes, wincing as she reflected how much there was to do in this neglected field.

"And, Nora," she went on, "I shall expect you to do as I tell you, and always to tell me the truth."

"Shall I stay at your house and be warm?" asked Nora.

"Always, poor child, if you try to do right," said Miss Barnes.

"Are these things mine?" was the next question, looking lovingly at her pretty blue dress and cloak.

"Yes, and you shall have plenty of clothes, and always enough to eat, Nora. I hope you will never again be so miserable as I found you."

Nora could not comprehend what had come to her. She sat there as though stupefied, only

now and then whispering to herself, "Always enough to eat, always warm."

"Thomas," said Miss Barnes, in her most peremptory manner, as he held the carriage-door for her to alight, "I especially desire that you should not mention to any one where I got this child. I want to make a new life for her, and I trust to your honor to keep her secret."

Thomas touched his hat.

"Indeed, you may be sure of me, Miss Barnes."

And faithfully he kept his word, although all the household was in consternation when Miss Barnes installed the child as her adopted daughter, procured a governess for her, had a complete outfit of suitable clothes prepared, and, above all, took unwearied pains to teach her all the little things necessary to place her on a level with the girls she would meet when she went to school.

Nora soon learned the ways and manners of a lady. She seemed to be instinctively delicate and lady-like. She was pretty, too, when her

face grew plump and the hungry look went out of her eyes.

Miss Barnes, though on the sharp look-out, never discovered a vice in her. Whatever may have been her original faults, she seemed to have shed them with her rags, and the great gratitude she felt for her benefactor overwhelmed everything. She seemed to live but to do something for Miss Barnes.

To Nora, life was like a dream — a dream of heaven, at that. Always warm, always fed, always safe from roughness, surrounded by things so beautiful she scarcely dared to touch them; every want attended to before it was felt. It was too wonderful to seem true. In dreams she would often return to the desolate shanty, where the winds blew through the cracks, and the rickety old stove was no better fed than her mother and herself.

Five years rolled away. Miss Barnes grew to love this child of poverty very much, and to be grieved that she showed none of the joy of youth. For Nora walked around as though in a dream. She was always anxious to please,

always cheerful, but never gay. She was too subdued. She never spoke loud. She never slammed a door, she never laughed.

"Nora," said she one day, after studying her face some time in silence, "why are you not like other young girls?"

"Why am I unlike them?" asked Nora, looking up from the book she was reading.

"You're not a bit like any young girl I ever saw," said Miss Barnes; "you're too sober, you never laugh and play."

"I don't know how to play," said Nora, in a low tone; "I never did."

"Poor child," said Miss Barnes, "you never had any childhood. I wanted to give you one, but you were too old when I took you. Why, you're a regular old woman."

"Am I?" said Nora, with a smile.

"I don't know what I'll do to you," Miss Barnes went on. "I'd like to make you over."

"I wish you could," said Nora earnestly. "I try to be like other girls, but somehow I can't. I seem always to have a sort of weight on my heart."

"Nora, is n't there something you would like that I have n't done for you? Have n't you a wish?"

"Oh!" cried Nora, "I can't wish for anything, you make me too happy, but" — she hesitated, and tears began to fall fast — "I can't forget my old life, it comes back in my dreams, it is always before me. I don't want to tell you, but I must. I can't help thinking about the many miserable girls, such as I was, living in horrid shanties, starved, frozen, beaten, wretched."

"Then you have a wish?" said Miss Barnes softly.

"Oh, it seems so ungrateful!" Nora sobbed. "Such a poor return for the life you have given me! I have tried to forget. I can't tell what is right for me to do. I'm sorry I said anything."

"No, Nora," said Miss Barnes promptly. "You should tell me all your wishes and feelings. If they are wrong, I can help you outgrow them; if right" — she hesitated — "why, I must help you."

Nora fell on her knees with the most impulsive movement Miss Barnes, had ever seen.

"Oh, I do believe you are an angel!"

"Far from it, Nora," said Miss Barnes smiling, "but I've set out to make you happy, and if I find whims and notions in your head, I suppose I'll have to follow them out. But seriously, dear child, I must say I have had a little uneasy feeling of responsibility in my heart ever since I've had you. And there's nothing to hinder my being as odd as I please, and now let me hear your plans."

"I have no plans. I have only longings to do something for them."

Well; plans grew fast as they always do when planners are anxious to do something. Long into the night they talked, and the very next day the work began. Nora captured a poor little girl who came to beg, and took her in to Miss Barnes, in spite of the horror of the servants. They found she had no parents, and decided to take her, and Nora went on to make her decent, with more pleasure than she had ever known.

So it went on; before the end of a month, Miss Barnes found herself more interested than she had been in anything. And Nora grew bright and happy as the months rolled by, and one after another wretched girl was gathered out of the streets and brought to a home.

As soon as one girl was trained and fitted to take a place in some one's kitchen, or sewing-room, or nursery, a dozen places opened to her. By telling a little of her story, Miss Barnes interested her new mistress in the girl, who was thus started out in a useful, independent life.

This institution, though it never had a name, grew and flourished, and Nora still lives in the Barnes Home, manages the Barnes income, and "lends a hand" wherever needed.

"And that's the story of how the Barnes Home came to be," said Mrs. Wilson, in ending.

"And was that nice lady that you went to see about a maid," cried Kristy eagerly, turning to her mother, "was she Nora?"

"Yes," said her mother, "she was Nora."

"That was fine!" said Kristy. "Thank you so much, Mrs. Wilson."

"That story of a great charity, started through one poor girl," said Mrs. Wilson, "reminds me of another that I heard lately; shall I tell it, Kristy?"

"Oh, do!" said Kristy.

CHAPTER IX

ONE LITTLE CANDLE

This story is about a girl not much older than you, who had a great trouble come upon her, some years ago. Her father who was — I'm sorry to say — a drunkard, had at last died, leaving Alice Rawson, and her brother a little older, to take care of their invalid mother.

The trouble that came upon her, as I said, was the finding that the brother, who was steady at his work, and proud to support the family, began to go out every evening. The great dread seized her that he would follow in the footsteps of his father. They had suffered so much from the father's habits, that this was almost more than she could bear, and she felt sure that it would kill her mother.

She tried every way she could think of to entertain her brother at home, but she could not make it gay and lively as it was in the

saloon where the boys met, and when she tried to coax him to stay at home, he answered her that it was awful dull in the evening after a long day's work.

Alice could not deny this, and she had not a word to say when one evening he ended with, "You can't expect a fellow to stay mewed up at home all the time. Now look here," as he saw the tears come into Alice's eyes, "you need n't fret about me, Sis. I 'm bound to take care of myself, but I must have a little pleasure after working all day. Good-by; I'll be home by nine."

But he was not home by nine, nor by ten, and the clock had struck eleven when Alice heard his step. She hurried to the door to let him in. His face was flushed, and his breath — alas! — reminded her of her father's.

He made some excuse and hurried off to bed, and Alice sank into a chair in the sitting-room. She was shocked. She was grieved. This was the first time Jack had showed signs of being under the influence of strong drink, and she felt as if she could not bear it.

A month before, they had laid in a drunkard's grave their father, and over his terrible death-bed, Jack had promised their mother that he would not follow in his steps.

"Yet now — so soon — he has begun," thought Alice, sitting there alone in the cold. "And how can I blame him, poor boy!" she went on, "when it is so dull and stupid for him here? It 's no wonder he prefers the pleasant warm room, the lights, the gay company, the games that he gets at Mason's. Oh, why are n't good things as free as bad ones!" she cried out in her distress.

"But what can I do?" was the question to which her thoughts ever came back. "I must save Jack, for he 's all mother and I have; but how?"

"What can one girl do, without money and without friends — almost?" thought Alice, remembering, with a shudder, that a drunkard's daughter is apt to have few influential friends.

Alice Rawson was clear-headed though young. She thought the matter over during the next day, as she went about her work in

the house, waiting on her invalid mother, making the cottage tidy, and cooking their plain meals.

"It's no use to talk," she said to herself; "Jack means to do what's right. And it's even worse to scold or be cross to him, for that only makes him stay away more." And she gave the pillow she was stirring up a savage poke to relieve her feelings.

"I know, too," she went on, pausing with the other pillow in her hand, "that when he's there with the boys, it's awful hard never to spend a cent when the others do. It looks mean, and Jack hates being mean;" and she flung the pillow back into its place with such spirit that it went over on to the floor.

"What are you banging about so for?" asked her mother, from the next room.

"Oh, nothing. I was thinking, mother," she answered. And she went on thinking.

"What would be best would be to have some other place just as pleasant, and warm, and free as Mason's, — some *good* place." Alice sighed at this thought.

"It can't be here at home, because it takes so much money to have it warm and light; and besides, his friends would n't feel free to come, and it would be lonely for him."

"Alice, what *are* you muttering about?" called Mrs. Rawson.

"Nothing, mother; I 'm only making a plan."

"If I could get books and papers," she went on, closing the door, and starting for the kitchen; "but Jack is too tired to read much."

Suddenly a new thought struck her, and she stood in the middle of the kitchen like a statue.

"I wonder — I do wonder why a place could n't be fixed — a room somewhere! I believe people would help if they only thought how good it would be for boys. That would be splendid!" And she looked anything but a statue now, for she fairly beamed with delight at the thought.

"I don't suppose I can do much alone," she said later, as the plan grew more into shape; "but it's for Jack, and that 'll help me

talk to people, I 'm sure, and at least I can try."

She did try. Without troubling her mother with her plans, — for she knew she would be worried and think of a dozen objections to it, — in her delicate state of health, — Alice hurried through with her work, put on her things, and went to call first on Mr. Smith, a grocer. She happened to know that at the back of Mr. Smith's store was a room opening on a side street, which he had formerly rented for a cobbler's shop, but which was now empty.

Alice's heart fluttered wildly a moment, when she stood before the grocer in his private office, where she was sent when she asked of the clerk an interview with Mr. Smith.

"You are Rawson's daughter, I believe," was Mr. Smith's greeting.

"Yes," said Alice, "I am Alice Rawson, and you 'll think I am crazy, I 'm afraid, when I tell you my errand," she went on, trembling. "But oh, Mr. Smith! if you remember my father before — before" —

"I do, child," said the grocer kindly, supposing she had come to ask for help.

"Then you'll not wonder," she went on bravely, "that I am going to try every way to save my brother."

"Is your brother in danger?" asked Mr. Smith. "And what can I do?"

"He is in danger," said Alice earnestly, "of doing just as father did, and so are lots of other boys, and what you can do is to let me have Johnson's old shop, free of rent for a little while, to make an experiment — if I can get help," she added warmly.

"But what will you do? I don't understand," said Mr. Smith.

"What will I do? Oh, I'll try to make a place as pleasant as Mason's saloon, that shan't cost anything, and I'll try to get every boy and young man to go there, and not to Mason's. If they could have a nice, warm place of their own, Mr. Smith, don't you think they would go there?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know but they would," said the

grocer; "but it 's an experiment. I don't see where you 'll get things to put in, or your fire, or anything to make it rival Mason's. However, I 'm busy now and can't talk more, and as you 're in earnest and the cause is good, I 'll let you have the room to try the plan."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Alice.

"Here 's the key," taking that article down from a nail. "Say no more, child, I could n't rent it this winter anyway," as she tried to speak.

Alice walked out with her precious key, feeling as if the whole thing was done. But it was far from that.

Her next visit — she had carefully planned them all out — was to a man who sold wood; for in that village wood was the only fuel.

This man, Mr. Williams, had a son who was somewhat dissipated, therefore he was ready to listen patiently to Alice's pleading, and to help in any really practical plan. He listened interestedly, and promised to give a cord of cut wood to begin with, and if it proved a success, to give enough to run the fireplace — there

was no stove — all the evenings of that winter.

Next, Alice went to the finest house in the village, where lived Mrs. Burns, a wealthy lady, whose son was wild and gave her anxiety.

"She must pity mother and me," thought Alice, as she walked up the broad walk to the house, "and I 'm sure she 'll help."

She did. She was surprised at Alice's bravery, but warmly approved of her plan. "You 'll want books and papers," she said, "and you must have hot coffee always ready."

"I had n't dared to think of so much," said Alice.

"But you must have coffee," repeated Mrs. Burns, "or they 'll miss their beer too much ; and you must charge enough to pay for it, say two cents a cup ; I think it could be made for that."

"But then we must have some one to make it," said Alice thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Mrs. Burns, "and I think I know the very woman — Mrs. Hart. She is poor, and I know will be glad, for a little

wages (which I shall pay her), to spend her evenings there, making coffee. She 's a jolly sort of a person, too, and I think would be just the one to make the boys feel at home.

"And I 'll do more," went on the kind-hearted woman, "I 'll give you an old-fashioned bookcase I have upstairs, and some books to start a library. Other ladies will give you more, and you 'll have it full, no doubt."

After leaving Mrs. Burns, Alice's work was much easier, for that lady gave her a little subscription book, in which she entered Mr. Smith's gift of the room-rent, Mr. Williams's gift of the wood, and her own of the hire of the woman to tend it, a dozen books in a bookcase, and two comfortable chairs.

Alice called at nearly every house in the village, and almost every one gave something. Several gave books; two or three others agreed to send their weekly papers when they had read them; many gave one chair each; three or four gave plain tables, games, —backgammon and checkers, — and two or three bright colored prints were promised.

Red print curtains for the windows, and cups and saucers for the coffee, came from the village storekeeper, a teakettle to hang over the fire, and a tin coffee-pot, came from the tin-shop; cheap, plated teaspoons from the jeweler; two copies of the daily paper and promise of lots of exchanges, from the editor of the only paper.

In fact, a sort of enthusiasm seemed to be aroused on the subject, and when Alice went home that night, her little book had a list of furniture enough to make the room as pleasant as could be desired.

The next day was quite as busy. The woman Mrs. Burns had engaged came to put the room in order, and after it had a thorough scrubbing, Alice went out to collect the furniture. The village expressman, who owned a hand-cart, had subscribed his services to the plan, and Alice went with him, book in hand, and gathered up the gifts.

The floor was covered with fresh sawdust—the butcher sent that; the gay curtains were up, the bookcase full of books was arranged,

some tables were covered with papers, and others with games, a rousing fire was built in the fireplace, the tea-kettle was singing away merrily, and at a side table with cups and coffee things, sat Mrs. Hart, when Alice asked Jack to go somewhere with her. He consented though a good deal surprised. She brought him to this room.

"What's this?" asked Jack, as they turned down the street. A sign was over the door (Mr. Dover, the sign-painter gave that) of "COFFEE-ROOM." This is something new."

"Yes," said Alice, "let's go in."

Jack was too surprised to reply, and followed his sister as she opened the door.

There sat smiling Mrs. Hart, with knitting in hand, a delightful odor of coffee in the air, and a sign over her table which said "Coffee two cents."

"Let's have some," said Jack; "how good it smells!"

"Since you went out, Miss Alice," said Mrs. Hart, as she poured the two cups, "a big package of coffee — ten pounds at the least — and

another of sugar has most mysteriously appeared;" and she nodded towards the grocer's part of the house, to indicate the giver.

"Why, what have you to do with it?" asked Jack, looking sharply at Alice.

"She!" exclaimed Mrs. Hart. "Don't you know? She got it up; it's all her doing — everything in this room."

"No, no, Mrs. Hart," protested Alice, "I did n't give a single thing."

"Except your time and the plan, and everything," said Mrs. Hart warmly.

"What does it mean? Tell me, Alice," asked Jack; and she told him. "And the room is for you, Jack, and the other boys; and every evening there 'll be a bright fire and hot coffee, and Mrs. Hart to make it, and I hope — oh, I do hope — you 'll come here and have a good time every night," she ended.

Jack was touched. "Ally, you're a trump! and I'll do it sure."

And he did. At first when the story got out, all the boys came from curiosity to see

what one girl had done; and after that they continued to come because it was the pleasantest place in town and all their own.

No irksome restraints were put upon the boys, and there were no visitors who came to give them temperance lectures or unwelcome advice; no boy was asked to read book or paper, and no one was told how much better for him was coffee than beer. This, each one found out for himself, in the best way — by experience.

Every evening, before it was time for the boys to begin to come, Alice would run down to see that everything was right, that the fire was bright, the coffee ready, and Mrs. Hart in her place. Then she would open the bookcase, select three or four of the most interesting looking books, and lay them around on the tables, in a careless way, as if they were accidentally left there.

Nor did she let people forget about it. As often as once a week, she went to the houses of those most interested, and received from one the weekly papers that had been read, from

another a fresh book or magazine, and from a third some new game or a pretty print to put on the wall.

Coffee and the things to put in it, Alice had no need to ask for. The two cents a cup proved to be more than enough to pay for it.

Promptly at half-past nine Mrs. Hart gathered up the things and washed the cups and saucers, and as the clock struck ten she put out the lights and locked the door.

Books and papers did their silent work, and before spring the young men grew ashamed of owing their comforts to charity, so they agreed among themselves to pay a small sum weekly toward expenses. It was not binding on any one, but nearly every one was glad to do it, and by this means, before another winter, the coffee-room was an independent establishment.

The power it was among those boys could not be told, till years afterwards, when it was found that nearly every one who had spent his evenings there had become a sober, honest citizen, while those who preferred the saloon,

filled drunkards' graves, or lived criminals, and a pest upon society.

On Jack himself, the effect was perhaps the most striking. As Alice had started the thing, he could not help feeling it his business to see that the boys had a good time, and also, to keep order among them. Mrs. Hart soon found that he was a sort of special policeman, always ready to settle difficulties, and make the boys behave themselves if necessary — which it seldom was.

Feeling the responsibility of his position and influence, brought out in him a manliness of character he had never before shown, and when he became a man in years, no one could have the slightest fear that Jack Rawson would ever follow in the downward steps of his father. And all this he owed to the fact that Alice tried what one girl could do.

It is Shakespeare who says, —

> "How far that little candle throws its beams!
> So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

"You said it was going on now," said Kristy, as Mrs. Wilson paused.

"Yes, it is; I was in that town a few days ago, and one of the neighbors told me the whole story."

"That's a good deal for one girl to do," said Kristy.

"I know it is," said Mrs. Wilson, "but I know of another girl who did almost as much."

"What did she do?" asked Kristy, all interest.

"She conquered a crusty old woman, who was soured to all the world."

"Conquered her?" asked Kristy puzzled.

"Yes; shall I tell you? I see it is raining yet, and mamma's time is n't out."

"Please do!" said Kristy, adding as she turned to her mother, "Mamma, you 're getting off too easy."

"Oh, I'm afraid I shall have to make it up later," said mamma, in pretended dismay.

"Indeed you will," said Kristy, with a laugh; "I shan't let you off a single story."

"We 'll see," said mamma smiling, as Mrs Wilson began.

CHAPTER X

THE LOCKET TOLD

This is about a girl who drove the village cows out to pasture every morning and back to the village every evening. She had to pass a small cottage, almost hidden with flowers, where lived a mysterious woman whom the foolish and ignorant children of the neighborhood called "old witch," simply because she had a hump on her back and was rarely seen, except when she rushed out to drive away some naughty child trying to steal her flowers through the fence. She attended to her garden very early in the morning before other people were out of bed, and so was rarely seen except on these occasions.

One day she was sitting at her window, behind the blinds as usual, when the girl I spoke of came by with her cows.

"There 's that cow-girl again," said Hester

Bartlett — for that was her name — "staring at my sweet peas as usual! I must go and drive her away or she 'll be putting her hand through the fence to get some. But what a wretched looking creature she is!" she went on thoughtfully, looking more closely. "She 's worse off than you are, Hester Bartlett, if she has n't got a humpback. Hardly a decent rag to her back — not a shoe or stocking — an old boy's hat, picked out of a gutter likely. And how she does stare! looks as if she'd eat the flowers. Well anyway," she went on more slowly, "she's got good taste; she never turns an eye on my finest flowers, but stands glued to the sweet peas."

Another silence; the ragged girl still spellbound without; the little, humpbacked mistress of the house peering through the blinds, an unusual feeling of pity restraining her from going to the door and putting to flight the strange, shy girl who seemed so fond of sweet peas.

"I 've a good mind to give her some," was the kind thought that next stirred her heart,



She had to pass a cottage, almost hidden with Flowers.

"but I suppose she'd run away if I spoke to her, or call me old witch as the rest of 'em do," she went on bitterly, talking to herself, as people do who live alone; then adding, "Well, I can't stand here all day; I must go on with my work," she took up a watering-pot she had filled, and started for her little flower patch.

The instant the door opened, the flower-lover at the fence started on a run after the cows, which finding themselves not urged from behind, had stopped and were contentedly cropping the grass beside the road.

In a few minutes she had them safely shut into their pasture, and turned back towards the village.

As she passed Miss Hester, that lady was tying up some straggling vines, and almost to her own surprise, moved by her unwonted feeling of pity for the child, she hastily picked half a dozen stems of the fragrant blossoms and held them out.

"Want some?" she said shortly, almost gruffly, to the half-frightened child.

The girl stopped. "Oh, Miss Hester!" she said doubtingly, half afraid of the strange-looking, little woman who lived by herself, and was never known to speak to anybody.

"If you don't want 'em," said Miss Hester savagely, "you need n't have 'em," and she flung the flowers far over the fence and turned away.

Maggie — for that was her name — with a cry of horror sprang eagerly after them, picked them up carefully, shook off the dust, and turned again to the little garden. But Miss Hester had gone in and shut the door, and slowly, but in a state of rapture, the child went on — hugging and caressing her flowers, — to what had been her home since her mother, a year before, had been carried from their poor room to the hospital, and never come back. She lived with a woman who added a bit to her scanty earnings by taking the village cows on their morning and evening journeys, and for this service she gave Maggie a shelter and a share of the scanty food on her table.

When she went with the cows that evening, Maggie looked eagerly into the little garden as she passed, but Miss Hester was not there. Maggie could not see her, but she sat behind her blind looking out eagerly. Could it be to see the child?

Maggie hesitated; she wanted to say "Thank you," yet she was half afraid of the strange, silent woman. She waited a moment, hoping she would come out, but all was still, and slowly and lingeringly at last she went on.

In this odd way began a curious acquaintance between the lonely woman and the still more friendless girl. Sometimes, if Miss Hester happened to be in her garden when Maggie went by, she would half reluctantly toss a flower over the fence, which Maggie always received with delight, while still half afraid of the giver. But generally Hester, with a strange feeling of shyness, managed to be in the house, where strange to say, she hung around the window and seemed unable to settle to anything, till the pale little thing had passed.

So it went on, till winter settled down grim

and cold on that New England village, and the cows went no more to the snow-covered pasture, and Maggie — fixed up a bit as to clothes by some kind ladies of the village — went every day to school.

As the weather grew colder, Miss Hester shut herself more and more into her house, and so months passed and the strange acquaintance progressed no farther.

One cold night, after everybody in the little village was snugly tucked into bed, and every light was out, a wind came down from the plains of the great Northwest, and brought with it millions and billions of beautiful dancing flakes of snow, and proceeded to have a grand frolic.

All night long the snow and the wind played around the houses and through the streets, and in the morning when people began to get up and look out, they hardly knew their own village. It seemed to be turned into a strange range of white hills, with here and there a roof or a chimney peeping out. There were no fences, there were no roads, but all was one

mass of glittering white, and the wind was still at work tossing the billions of sharp little ice-needles into the face of any one who ventured to peep out, sending a shower of snow into an open door, and piling it up in great drifts in every sheltered spot. So nearly everybody who was comfortable at home, and had plenty to eat in the house, at once decided to stay there. There was no use trying to dig themselves out until the snow stopped falling, and the wind got tired of tossing it about.

The villagers were late in getting up, for the snow before the windows made it dark, and it was nearly nine o'clock when Mrs. Burns said to Maggie, "You must try to get to the well; I 'm out of water."

So Maggie put on her coat and mittens, tied her hood down over her ears, took the pail, and went out.

Fortunately, the kitchen door was in a sheltered place, and no snow was piled up before it, but she had a hard time getting through the drifts to the well. However, she did at last succeed in drawing the water and

getting back to the door. As she set down the pail, a thought struck her, — "What will become of Miss Hester in this storm?"

She went out again, closing the door softly behind her, and looked toward the cottage, which was not far off, in plain sight. In the place where the little house should be was a great white hill. Maggie floundered through the drifts till she reached the gate, where she had a better view.

The storm held up for a moment, so that Maggie could see over the village. Every house in sight was sending up a thin column of smoke, showing there was life within. Miss Hester's chimney alone was smokeless.

"Dear me!" thought the child, "I'm afraid she's sick, and what'll become of her and the cow — the shed is so far off, and she could never fight her way through the drifts, — she ain't very strong — and so little." Another pause while she strained her eyes to see signs of life about the cottage.

"Well, anyway," she said at last, "she was awful good to me last summer, and I'll

see if I can't get there to help her," and she bravely started out.

It was a hopeless-looking task, for between Mrs. Burns's and Hester Bartlett's were drifts that seemed mountain high. Not a soul was in sight, and just then the storm began again, wilder than ever.

But Maggie was not to be daunted; that cold, smokeless chimney gave her a strange feeling of fear, and nerved her for great efforts.

I shall not go with her step by step over her terrible journey, for though the house was near, every step was a struggle and a battle. Many times she fell down and got up staggering and blinded by snow; many times she lost her direction and had to wait till a momentary lull in the storm showed her the forlorn chimney again.

Through unheard-of difficulties she reached the house, her clothes full of the dry, powdery snow, her eyes blinded, her hair a mass of white, and aching in every limb from her efforts and the cold.

The front door was completely buried in

snow, and indeed, the whole front of the cottage seemed but a snow mountain. The drifts were lower on the side, so she staggered on towards the kitchen door. As she came near, she saw, to her dismay, that the snow had fallen away, and the door was open.

Now thoroughly alarmed, she struggled on, and reached the step. The snow had fallen inward, and the drift inside was as heavy as that outside.

At first she hesitated to enter the house she had always dreaded, but in an instant she reflected that Miss Hester would not leave her door open if she were able to shut it, and she staggered in. Two steps inside she stumbled over something, and dashing the snow out of her eyes, she saw to her horror, the well-known brown dress of Miss Hester, and sure enough there she lay on the floor, half covered with snow, silent — perhaps dead.

One little scream escaped Maggie's lips, and then she fell on her knees before her. No, she was not dead, but she was unconscious and perfectly cold.

In a moment her own sufferings were forgotten. She did not know or did not care that she was exhausted from her struggles — that she was herself half frozen. She flew to work.

First she dragged Miss Hester away from the snow, with difficulty shut the door, then hurried into the bedroom, brought out a pillow and blanket, put the pillow under Miss Hester's head, wrapped the blanket around her on the floor, and then hurried to the stove.

The fire was ready to light; evidently Miss Hester had opened the door to look out before starting her fire, and the great drift had fallen upon her and knocked her down.

Maggie did not stop to think of all this. She looked around for matches and lighted the fire, then turned her attention to the silent figure on the floor. She chafed her hands and warmed them in her own, which now from excitement were burning, and before long she had the happiness of seeing the closed eyes open and the blood rush back to the white face.

The sight of the child working over her brought Miss Hester to very quickly. She tried to spring up, but fell back too weak to do so. Then she began to talk.

"Where am I? Why are you here? Why can't I get up?"

As quickly as she could, Maggie told her everything. How the village was snowed under, and seeing her chimney without smoke alarmed her, and she had found her on the floor with snow-drifts over her, and had lighted the fire and got the blanket and warmed her.

Long before she had ended her tale, Miss Hester could sit up and see for herself the snow and the condition of the room. Then she thought she could get up, and with the help of Maggie she did, and sat in her chair, strangely enough — as it seemed to her — too weak to stand.

When she was seated, Maggie had stopped — it was different making fires and taking liberties in this kitchen while it seemed necessary to her life, but now that Miss Hester could sit up and look at her, Maggie hesitated. Miss

Hester leaned back and closed her eyes and then Maggie said:—

"Please, Miss Hester, may I get you something to eat, and sweep out the snow, and help you?"

"If you will, child," said Miss Hester slowly. "I don't seem to be able to do anything; I shall be very glad to have you."

Then Maggie went to work again, and how she did fly! She put the teakettle on to the now warmed stove; she searched about in the pantry till she found the coffee and the coffee-pot. Then she drew up beside Miss Hester a little table, put on the dishes, and in a word, proceeded to set out as dainty a breakfast as she knew how to get out of what she could find.

All this time Miss Hester had apparently been half asleep, so that Maggie did not like to ask her anything; but she was far from asleep. She was watching eagerly, through half-closed eyelids, everything her neat handmaiden did.

As for Maggie, she had not been so happy since her mother had taught her all sorts of

neat household ways. She hunted up the butter and the bread; she made a fragrant cup of coffee and toasted a slice of bread, and when all was ready, she spoke to Miss Hester.

"Please, Miss Hester," she said timidly, "will you drink some coffee? I think you will feel better."

Miss Hester opened her eyes as if just wakened. "Why, how nicely you have got breakfast!" she said; "but here's only one cup and plate! Get another for yourself — you shall have it with me;" and as Maggie hastened, delighted, to do her bidding, she added, "Bring a jar of marmalade from the second shelf, and look for some crullers in a stone crock."

Maggie did as she was bid, and in a few minutes the two strange friends were enjoying their breakfast together.

Miss Hester was confined to her bed several days, with the cold she had taken that fateful morning, and during that time, Maggie did everything for her, every minute she was out of school. When at last Miss Hester was able to be about, she had become so attached to

Maggie, and found such comfort in her help, that she was not willing to let her go. Maggie being equally delighted to stay, the arrangement was soon made, and Maggie came to the cottage to live.

The strangest part of the story is yet to come.

When Christmas time drew near, Miss Hester one day, while Maggie was at school, opened some long-closed drawers in her desk to see if she could find something to give Maggie on that day, for she had not forgotten her own youthful days when Christmas was the event of the year.

Among the long-forgotten treasures of the past, she came upon a little locket given her when she was about Maggie's age, by her only brother, who had gone to the war and been killed in battle, severing the last link that bound the solitary girl to the world. Since that, she had lived alone and shrank from all society.

"Poor Eddy!" she said, taking the trinket up in her hands, "how different would have

been my life if you had lived! But it 's no use keeping these relics of the past; they would much better make some one happy in the present. I think Maggie will like this."

With a sigh she turned over the contents of the drawer, every item of which was associated with her happier days, till she found a fine gold chain which had held the locket around her neck. This she laid aside with the locket, closed and locked the drawer.

When the great day arrived, Maggie, who had not dreamed of a present, was surprised and delighted to receive it. The locket was very pretty, of gold, with a letter B in black enamel on it. Miss Hester hung it around her neck, and was as pleased as Maggie herself to see how pretty it looked.

"I wonder if it will open," said Maggie to herself a little later, when she had taken it off to examine more closely; "I 'll try it," and she worked over it a long time but without success.

That was a very busy day in the cottage; that evening was to be a great school exhibition to which all the village was invited. Mag-

gie, who was a bright scholar, had to speak a piece, and Miss Hester had made her a pretty white dress out of an old one of her own.

Maggie never felt so fine in her life as when, her hair smoothly braided by Miss Hester, and tied with a bright ribbon from her old stores, she had put on the white dress, and hung around her neck the cherished locket.

For the first time in her life, she was dressed like other girls, and it was with a very happy heart that she kissed Miss Hester and went to the schoolhouse, regretting only that Miss Hester could not be persuaded to go with her.

After the exercises of the evening were over, a social hour followed, in which ice cream and cake were served, and every one walked around the room to talk with their friends; and now came the surprise of the evening — the most wonderful event in Maggie's life.

Among the familiar villagers, she had noticed a quiet, pleasant-faced man who seemed to be a stranger, — at least she had never seen

him before. He had come with the family from the little hotel, and no doubt at their invitation.

This gentleman was walking about, looking with interest at the people, when he came face to face with Maggie. He stopped suddenly; his eyes opened wide, and he seemed strangely moved — almost shocked.

Maggie was frightened, and tried to leave her place, but he stopped her with a low, eager question.

"Little girl, where did you get that locket?"

Maggie supposed he thought she had stolen it, and a bright color rose to her face, as she answered indignantly, "It was given to me to-day."

"By whom?" he cried; "tell me instantly!"

"By Miss Hester," Maggie replied, trying again to get away, for his eager manner frightened her.

"Miss Hester!" he repeated, in a disappointed tone, then muttering to himself, "It can't be! yet it is so like! let me see it!" with a sudden movement.

"No!" cried Maggie, now almost crying with fright, and clutching her treasure.

By this time some of the people around had noticed the scene, and the hotel-keeper came up.

"What is it, Mr. Bartlett?"

The gentleman tried to calm himself, seeing that they had become the centre of a curious crowd, and then replied: —

"Why, I find on this child the double of a locket I gave my sister years ago, a sister who has disappeared and whom I have been seeking for years; I wanted to examine it — but I seem to have frightened her; will you, if you know her, ask her to let me look at it? If it is the one I seek, it should open by a secret spring, and have a boy's face inside. If it should help me to find my long-lost sister!" He paused, much moved.

Mr. Wild, the hotel-keeper, calmed Maggie, and asked her to let the gentleman examine it.

As he took it in his hand, he murmured, "The very same! here is a mark I well remem-

ber. Now if I can open it!" He held it a moment when suddenly it sprang open, to Maggie's amazement, and there — sure enough — was a faded, old-fashioned daguerreotype of a boy's face.

"It is the very one!" he exclaimed in excitement. "Now where is this Miss — What did you say her name was? Where could she have got it?"

"She told me," said Maggie, trembling, "that her brother gave it to her."

"So I did," said the man eagerly; "but the name! can she have changed her name?"

"It is Miss Hester Bartlett," said one of the bystanders, "and she is — a little — deformed, and lives alone in the edge of the village."

The man turned so white he seemed about to faint as he said: "It is she! Friends" — turning to the much interested crowd, "I have sought her for years. I was in the army and reported killed in battle, and when I went home to take care of my unfortunate sister, she had disappeared, and I have never till

now found a clue to her. Take me to her instantly!" turning to Maggie, who was now really crying for joy to think of Miss Hester's happiness.

But the people urged that such a shock, when she supposed him dead, might be very dangerous, and at last he was persuaded to let some one who knew her break the joyful news to her.

Maggie went back to the cottage the happiest girl in the village, and the next morning the news was safely broken to Miss Hester, who in a short half hour found herself crying on her brother's shoulder — the richest and the happiest woman in all the world, as she said through her tears.

From that day a new life began for Maggie, for neither brother nor sister would hear of parting from her, who had been the means of their finding each other. A larger house was built, and Miss Hester persuaded to mingle a little with her neighbors, while Maggie took her place among the young people on equal terms with all.

"That was splendid!" said Kristy, with shining eyes, as Mrs. Wilson ended her story. "Is it true? Did it really happen?"

"Yes, it is true; I know Maggie myself, — met her last summer, when I went to B —."

"I should like to know her," said Kristy. "Can't you tell another, Mrs. Wilson?"

"Kristy," said her mother, reprovingly, "it 's bad enough for you to tease me for stories without making victims of others."

"Oh, I like to tell stories," said Mrs. Wilson, laughing, "and I think I have time to tell Kristy about the naughtiest day of my life."

"Oh, do!" cried Kristy eagerly.

"Did you ever notice in my sitting-room a little dog preserved in a glass case?"

"Yes, I have," said Kristy, "and I have always wondered about it."

"Well; I 'll tell you why I preserve it so carefully. That little dog saved my life, I believe, and if not my life, he certainly saved my reason."

"Oh, how was that, Mrs. Wilson?" said Kristy earnestly.

CHAPTER XI

HOW A DOG SAVED MY LIFE

I WAS twelve years old when I had the most dreadful experience of my life — an experience that I am sure would have ended in my death or insanity if it had not been for the love of my little dog Tony.

It was all my own fault, too — my own naughtiness. But let me begin at the beginning. My father and mother were going away from home on a short visit to my grandmother. They had arranged to have me stay at my Uncle Will's and had given Molly, the maid, leave to spend the time at her own home; so the house was to be shut up and left alone.

Now I had an intimate friend, a schoolmate, of whom my mother did not approve, for family reasons, which I understood when I was older, and she never liked to have me be

much with her. When Maud — for that was her name — found out that I was to be at my uncle's a few days, she at once asked me to stay with her instead. She offered all sorts of inducements. She was going to have a party — a dance it was — and my parents did not approve of dancing. In fact, she drew such an enticing picture of the good times we would have that I was tempted to do what I had never done in my life — deceive my own mother.

I did not dare ask her to let me go to Maud's, for I knew she would not consent, and if she positively forbade me, I think I should not have ventured to disobey, but if I did not ask her and she did not forbid, that — I thought — would not be so very bad. Fortifying myself by these thoughts, I decided to accept Maud's invitation secretly.

I made up my mind not to go to Uncle Will's at all, for I did not want them to know where I was going. I knew my father or mother would lock the house and leave the key at Uncle Will's, and I wanted to get my best clothes to go to Maud's party.

After some thought, and at Maud's suggestion, I planned to hide myself in the house till all had left it, then get the things I wanted, and slip out of a window that was not fastened.

I knew my mother would go all over the house before she left it, and the only place I could think of to hide was in the cellar. So with these naughty thoughts in my head, I took occasion, a short time before they were to start, to slip into the cellar and hide behind some barrels. I must say that I had always a foolish fear of the cellar, and nothing but my great desire to go to Maud's would have induced me to spend even a few minutes in it.

I heard my father drive up to the door and my mother walking about seeing that everything was shut and locked, but I did not hear that as she passed the cellar door she slipped the bolt into place.

When they were out of the house, and I heard them drive away, I came out of my hiding place, exulting in the thought that now

I was free to do as I liked. I would hurry up to my room, put my best dress and ribbons and things into a traveling bag, and hurry down to Maud's. I felt my way to the stairs, for it was late afternoon and the cellar — never very light in the brightest noon — was at that hour quite dark, and I went up those stairs the happiest, lightest-hearted girl in the world. Alas! it was my last happy moment for months.

I fumbled about for the latch, lifted it, and pushed the door. It did not open — and the truth flashed upon me. It was locked! I was a prisoner! The full horror of my position burst upon me. No one knew I was there. No one would seek me. No one could hear me, for the house was at some distance from others. I was a prisoner in a dark cellar — it was almost night — my parents would be gone three days!

I went into a frenzy, I shrieked and called, I pounded the door till my hands were bleeding, though all the time I knew no one could hear me.

I can scarcely remember what I did. I was, I believe, actually insane for a while.

Night came on; I heard — or I thought I heard — rats, and I remembered some of the terrible things I had read of these animals. I shouted again, and again beat the door. I cannot tell the horror and agony of those hours. I felt myself going mad.

I was aroused at last, after hours, — it seemed to me, — by the whining and crying of my dog, my pet, who was my constant companion. He was a clever little fellow and, I used to think, knew as much as some folks. He was now at the small, grated window of the cellar, crying and scratching at the earth, evidently trying to dig his way in to me.

His presence — even outside — comforted me, and a thought came to me. He had been taught to go to Uncle Will and others of the family, and perhaps he might be able to bring help. I called to him, and he responded joyfully. Then I gave him his order.

"Call Uncle Will!"

The faithful fellow did not want to leave

me; he whined and cried, but I repeated the order in as stern a voice as I could manage.

"Call Uncle Will!" I ordered again and again, and at last he ran off.

Then I took hope and began to listen. If Uncle Will came near, I meant to call and scream to attract his attention.

But hours passed; no one came — not even my dear Tony — and I heard noises and went mad again. I was getting exhausted, sitting uncomfortably on the top step of the stairs, and suffering such violent emotion.

Meanwhile there was excitement at Uncle Will's over the strange conduct of the dog. He barked, and howled, and cried at the door, till Uncle Will got out of bed to quiet him. But he would not be quiet, nor go into the house for all the coaxing. He insisted on barking, running towards the gate, and then back in the most frantic way.

At last, after he had kept the family awake all night, when daylight began to dawn, Uncle Will decided to follow him to see if he

could find what was the matter, though he was sure the poor fellow was raving mad.

The dog led him at once to the cellar window, where he dug at the earth, and whined and cried harder than ever. At first I did not hear him, — I think I had become unconscious, — but at last I did rouse myself enough to utter a scream which Uncle Will heard. He did not recognize my voice, — indeed he said afterwards that it sounded like nothing human, — but he resolved at any rate to see what it was.

He went to the kitchen door to unlock it, but the dog went wilder than ever, seeming to think I was behind that window. However, Uncle Will came in, and on his unlocking the cellar door, I fell on the floor in a heap, as if dead.

Uncle Will was awfully frightened; he took me up in his arms — big as I was — and ran with me back to his house, which was not far away.

It was hours before I was fully myself, months before I recovered from the illness

caused by the cold I had taken, and years before I got back my courage and could bear to be alone — especially at night, when all the horrors of that time would come up before me as vividly as on that dreadful night.

"How dreadful!" said Kristy in a low tone, as Mrs. Wilson paused.

"I need n't point the moral to you, Kristy," Mrs. Wilson said, "but I assure you I learned my lesson well; and that 's why I keep my dear little dog's body in a glass case. I cherished him beyond everything as long as he lived, and could n't bear to give him up when he died at a good old age.

"Now," said Mrs. Wilson, "I must really go. It has stopped raining, Kristy, and I have paid mamma's debt."

"No, indeed!" cried Kristy. "You have told me lovely stories, and mamma owes me two to pay for them!"

"That's a curious way of calculating," said Mrs. Wilson, laughing; "do you expect to be paid twice for everything?"

"Yes; when it 's stories," said Kristy.

"Kristy'll soon have to write stories for herself, I think," said her mother, smiling, "when she has exhausted the stock of all her friends."

Kristy blushed, but did not confess that that was her pet ambition.

"Now, mamma," said Kristy that evening after supper was over, "some more rainy day stories, please!"

"Will you have them all at once?" asked mamma, taking up some fancy knitting she kept for evenings, "or one at a time?"

"One at a time, please," answered Kristy.

"Well; get your work. How much did you do this afternoon?"

Kristy looked guilty. "You know I just *can't* remember to knit when I'm listening to a story. I — I — believe I did not knit once across."

Her mother laughed. "The poor Barton baby 'll go cold, I 'm afraid, if he waits for his carriage robe till you finish it. How would you like to knit him a pair of stockings? Shall I set them up and give you a daily stint?"

"Ugh!" said Kristy. "Please don't talk of anything so dreadful! You told me yourself how you hated it."

"It 's a very good plan, nevertheless," said Mrs. Crawford. "Perhaps it would have been wiser not to tell you about that."

"Now, mamma!" said Kristy reproachfully.

"I think," mamma went on, "that I shall have to make up for that story of a girl who did n't like to work, — at least that kind of work," — she corrected herself, "by telling you about a girl who worked enough for two."

"Oh, oh!" cried Kristy, "I 'm afraid that 'll not be very interesting."

"Well, you shall see," said mamma, "for I 'm going to tell you how she got up a whole Christmas tree alone, and made everything on it herself."

"Oh!" said Kristy relieved, "that 'll be good, I know; begin."

"Well, I 'll begin where the story begins, as I have heard May tell it, with a talk between

her sister and herself. One morning a little before Christmas the two girls got to talking about that happy time and the way it is celebrated, and May listened eagerly to Lottie's description of a tree she had at her aunt's the year before."

CHAPTER XII

LOTTIE'S CHRISTMAS TREE

"THERE 's no use wishing for anything away out here in the woods," said Lottie fretfully, rocking violently back and forth by the side of the bed.

"No, of course we could n't have one, but I should like to see a Christmas tree before I die. It must be splendid!"

And poor, sick May turned wearily on her pillow.

"You 're not going to die, May," said Lottie impatiently, "and I hope you 'll see lots of Christmas trees — if you don't this year. It 's your turn to go to Aunt Laura's next."

May sighed.

"I 'm too tired, Lottie. I never shall go."

"Of course you 're tired," said Lottie in the same fretful tone; "nothing to do, nothing to see, nothing to read — just lying on your

back, week after week, in this old log house. It's enough to make anybody sick. I s'pose it's awful wicked, but I think it's just too bad that we two girls have to live in this mean old shanty, with nobody but stupid old Nancy!"

"Oh, Lottie," said the sick girl anxiously, "don't forget father, and what a comfort we are to him."

"You are, you mean," interrupted Lottie.

"No, I mean you. I'm an expense and care to him; but what could he do without you? And remember," she went on softly, "how he hated to bring us to this lonely little place, and wanted to put us in school, and leave us, but we begged him"—

"Yes, I remember," said Lottie regretfully, "and I am wicked as I can be to talk so; but thinking about Aunt Laura's tree, it did seem too bad you could n't have one, too. You have so few pleasures."

"Oh, I have lots of pleasures!" cried May eagerly. "I love to lie here and look out into the woods, — the dear, sweet, quiet woods, —

and remember the nice times we used to have before I was sick; and I like"—

"You like some dinner by this time, I guess," said Nancy, coming in with her dinner nicely served on a tray.

Lottie got up, went into the next room, threw an old shawl over her head, and stepped out of the side door into the woods, for the house had not been built long, and all the clearing was on the other side.

Though it was winter, it was not very cold, and the woods were almost as attractive as in summer.

Walking a few rods, Lottie sat down on her favorite seat, a fallen tree trunk covered with moss.

"I declare, it's too bad!" she began to herself. "I believe May is dying because it's so stupid here. I could 'most die myself. I wonder if I could n't do something to amuse her. Could n't I buy something, or make something," she went on, slowly turning over in her mind all her resources. "Let me see, — I have two dollars left. I wish I could buy her

a set of chessmen! She and father play so much. Wait! wait!" she cried excitedly, jumping up and dancing around; "I have it! I can make her a set like Kate Selden's, or something like it, I know! Oh, dear! won't that be splendid! How delighted she will be! But where 'll I get the figures?"

She sat down again more soberly, and fell into a brown study.

"My two dollars will buy enough china dolls, I guess, and I 'll get Aunt Laura to send them to me by mail."

This was a bright thought, and the more she thought of it, the greater grew her plan. She remembered several things she could make, and before she went into the house, she even ventured to dream of a tree.

That night a mysterious letter was written, the two dollars slipped in, sealed, and directed, ready to give to the postman, an old man who passed every day with mail for the village.

Never did ten days seem so long to Lottie as that particular ten days which passed before she got her answer. Every day, at the

postman's hour, she ran up to the road and waited for him, all the time planning the wonderful things she would do. At last, one day, the old man stopped his horse, fumbled in his saddlebags, and brought out a package directed to her.

She seized it, and ran off to open her treasure. What did the package contain? Nothing but twenty-eight china dolls, some silver and gilt paper, and some bits of bright silk.

"Auntie has got everything!" she exclaimed joyfully; "and now I can go right to work."

Now the log house had but four rooms,—the living-room, where they ate, and where old Nancy cooked at a big cave of a fireplace, in which logs were burning from fall to spring; the girls' room, where May lay, which was also warmed by a big fireplace; father's room, and a room in the attic for Nancy.

Lottie could not work in the cold, nor in May's room, so she established herself in a warm corner of the living-room, far enough from Nancy's dull eyes, and near a window.

Day after day she worked, making excuses to May for leaving her so much alone, and hiding her work before her father came in at night.

I will tell you how she made the set of chessmen. First she hunted up a smooth, thin board, from which she cut, with her father's saw, a square piece about twenty inches square. The middle of this board she laid out in blocks with a pencil and ruler, careful to make them exactly perfect. The blocks were two inches square and there were eight each way; in fact, it was a copy of the chessboard her father had made.

These squares she covered with gilt and silver paper alternately, covering the joinings with strips of very narrow gilt bordering. The edge of the board she covered with a strip of drab-colored cloth she found in the piece-trunk.

The board being finished, — and it was really very pretty, —she had next to make the chessmen. For these she used the china dolls, the tallest of which was three inches high.

Half of the dolls were white and the other half black; the white to wear blue and white, the black ones scarlet and drab.

The dressing was a work of art, for she wished to make them look like the characters they represented. She looked through the picture-books in the house to see how kings and queens and knights and bishops were dressed. Pictures of kings and queens she found in a geography, knights in a volume of Shakespeare, and a bishop in an odd number of an old magazine.

Then she went to work. The pawns were dressed as pages, the kings and queens in flowing robes, with crowns of gilt or silver paper, glued on, the knights in coats of mail, — strips of silver paper laid over one another like the shingles on a roof, — the bishops in long gowns, with mitre on the head, — all in the two colors of their respective sides. The four castles were made of pieces of gray sandpaper, glued into cylinder shape, with battlement-shaped strips around the top; when glued on their standards, they looked like little stone castles.

When they were all dressed, — and it took many days and much contriving, — Lottie found that few of them would stand up, and those which possessed the accomplishment were very tottlish, and fell down at the slightest provocation.

That would never do, so she set her wits to work to provide standards.

She took an old broom handle, and sawed it into thin slices.

When she had thirty-two of these slices, she covered them neatly with pieces of old black broadcloth, glued on, over top, edge, and all. Then she dipped the feet of each china personage into the hot, stiff glue, and held it in place till the glue set.

They would stick nicely, and stand up as straight as any chessmen.

Then she drew the long robes into folds, just touched with glue, and festooned to the standard so as not to get out of place.

When the whole set was done, Lottie was delighted; and, indeed, they were extremely pretty.

Every night, when May and her father would get out the old set, made of button moulds, with the name printed on with ink, Lottie would think what a surprise there would be.

But she was not done with plans.

May had a picture, a delicate pencil-sketch of her mother, the only likeness they had. It was the sick girl's treasure. Too careful of it to allow it to hang on the wall and get soiled, she kept it in an old book under her pillow, and to take it out and look at it every day was her delight. Now Lottie planned to make a frame for this treasure.

On pretense of looking at it, she took its dimensions, and then went to work. Cutting a piece of cardboard of the right size, she proceeded to cover it with little bunches of grasses she had dried in the summer, standing up in vases so that they drooped gracefully. At the top, where the stems of the grasses met, she placed a bunch of bitter-sweet berries, the brilliant red and orange just the needed bit of color to perfect the whole.

It was laid away in a chest with the chessmen, ready to receive the picture.

And now she began to plan for the adornment of the tree.

Candles were the greatest anxiety, but with the help of Nancy, she made a few large ones into twenty as neat and pretty little "dips" as you ever saw.

Walnuts she ornamented with gilt bands and loops to be hung by; apples, the reddest and whitest, were similarly prepared; tiny cornucopias, made of white letter paper trimmed with bits of gilt, filled with popped corn and meats of butternuts nicely picked out; dainty baskets made of old match-boxes, covered with gay paper, and with festooned handles; gorgeous pink and white roses of paper; tiny cakes of maple sugar, delicious sticks and twists of molasses candy; dainty drop cakes and kisses smuggled into the oven on baking-day, — all were secreted in the wonderful chest in the attic.

At last came the day before Christmas, and Lottie took the axe and went into the woods, for this woods-girl could not only bake cakes,

dress dolls, and saw broomsticks, but she could even chop down a tree, if it was small.

She found a beautiful spruce tree, which had evidently been growing all these years on purpose for a Christmas tree, so straight it stood, and so wide and strong were its branches.

Cutting it down, and dragging it home over the snow, Lottie presented herself at the kitchen door, to the astonished eyes of Nancy.

"Now, Nancy, don't you say a word to May. I'm going to surprise her."

"'Deed 'n I should think you'd surprise her, could she see you dragging that big log into the house!"

"Well, you help me in with it, for I don't want to break its branches."

"All on my clean floor!" cried Nancy, in dismay.

"Yes, quick!" said Lottie; "it won't muss, you'll see."

Nancy helped her, and the tree yielded to fate and four strong arms, and went in.

It did look big, and when Lottie stood

it up in a tub, it nearly touched the wall. Around the trunk of the tree, to steady it, she packed sticks of wood till it stood firm. Then she covered the whole, tub, wood, and floor around, with great sheets of green moss, which she had pulled out from under the snow the day before.

She got the tree in early in the morning, and every moment she could steal from May through the day she spent in filling it, hanging on her treasures, fastening her candles by sticking large pins up through the small branches, and standing the candles on them.

The chessboard stood prominently on the moss at the foot of the tree, and the frame, with its picture, hung from one branch.

When her father came home, he found supper served, as a Christmas eve treat, Lottie said, in May's room, and adroitly he was kept out of the mysterious room.

When he was finishing his last cup of tea, and was talking with May, Lottie slipped out, lighted a long taper, and in five minutes had the tree all ablaze with light.

"Father," she said, quietly opening the door, "will you bring May out to her Christmas eve?"

"What!" said father.

But mechanically he took in his arms the light form of his daughter, and followed Lottie. At the door he stood transfixed, and May could not speak or breathe for wonder.

That one moment paid Lottie for all her hard work, but Nancy's "Do tell!" as she peeped over their shoulders and saw the illuminated tree, broke the spell.

Father broke out with tears in his eyes, "Why, Lottie!" and May cried ecstatically: "How wonderful! how lovely! is it a dream? is it fairies?"

"No, May," Lottie whispered, coming up softly behind her, "it 's only a Christmas tree, and it's yours!"

"Mine! and you made it?" exclaimed May, understanding at once Lottie's intense occupation of the last month.

"Who helped you, my daughter?"

"No one, father," said Lottie.

"Well, it's wonderful, really wonderful. How could you do it all alone? I can't understand it! What a little, smothered volcano you must have been all these weeks!"

"I could hardly keep from telling," said Lottie, with happy eyes.

But now May asked to be carried nearer, and each treasure was examined. The ingenious chessmen were praised, and the frame brought a shower of happy tears from May.

Then there was a surprise for father, for Lottie had found time to make him a nice, warm muffler, and May had knit him a pair of mittens, which she now brought out. And Nancy was not forgotten, for Lottie had made her an apron, and May had made her a tatting collar. Neither was Lottie neglected, for May had netted her a beautiful new net.

And father now drew out of his pocket a letter which he had received from Aunt Laura that morning, on opening which, two new ten-dollar bills were found, presents from Aunt Laura to the girls, "to buy some keepsake with," the letter said.

"And I was so cross, thinking I should not have any Christmas," said May repentantly.

"And I was so sad, thinking how different would have been my daughters' Christmas if their dear mother had been with us," said father softly.

"And you, Lottie — like a dear, old darling as you are," said May, giving her a spasmodic hug, "were all the time working away with all your might that I might have the most splendid Christmas tree! I don't believe Aunt Laura's is half so pretty!"

"It must be fun to dress up a tree yourself," said Kristy, when the story was ended.

"And still more," said her mother, "to get it up, as Lottie did, out of almost nothing. It 's easy enough to go out and buy enough to cover a tree, but it 's a very different affair to make the presents one's self.

"Another unusual Christmas celebration that I have heard about was even more strange than Lottie's, though several people took part

in getting it up. It took place in a baggage-car," went on Mrs. Crawford.

"In a baggage-car?" said Kristy.

"Yes; attached to a train that was snowed up in Minnesota one winter. It was the time that Ethel Jervis was ill, — you remember, — and her mother took her to Minnesota for her health."

"She took Harry, too, did n't she?" asked Kristy.

"Yes; she could n't leave him very well, so he was with them."

"Tell me about it!" said Kristy.

CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTMAS IN A BAGGAGE-CAR

Mrs. Jervis and her two children, Ethel and Harry, were on their way to spend Christmas with the grandmother, who lived in a small town in Minnesota, three or four hours' journey from Minneapolis, where they were spending the winter. There had been a good deal of snow, but they did not think much about it, for they were not used to Minnesota snowstorms.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and they were tired and anxious to reach B—— before night, when the train — after a good deal of puffing, and backing, and jerking forward and back — stopped short.

Several of the men went out to see what was the matter. Soon they began to come back, and one, whose seat was next to Mrs. Jervis, said, as he took his seat, "It does n't look much like getting to B —— to-night."

"What is the trouble?" asked Mrs. Jervis.

"Tremendous drifts in the cut," answered Mr. Camp. "Snow falling faster than ever, and wind piling it up faster than a thousand men could shovel it out. This cut is a regular snow-trap."

"Can't the engine plow through?" asked Mrs. Jervis anxiously.

"That's what has been tried," said the man; "but the snow is higher than the smoke-stack, and packed so tight it's almost solid. We may be here a week, for all I see, unless the storm holds up and we get help."

"Oh, mother!" wailed Ethel, "shan't we get to grandmother's for Christmas?"

"I hope so, Ethel!" said Mrs. Jervis soothingly. "It's three days to Christmas, you know, and a good deal may happen in three days. Could n't we go back?" she asked her neighbor. "If we could get back to Minneapolis it would be better than staying here," and she glanced anxiously at her daughter, whose wide, staring eyes were fixed on Mr. Camp, as if he held her fate in his hands.

"They tried a while ago, you remember," he said; "but the cut we passed through a mile back is now as bad as this. The fact is, we are between two cuts, and for all I see are prisoners here till we get help from outside."

Mrs. Jervis heard this with dismay, and Ethel with despair. She buried her face in her mother's lap, and shook all over with the violence of her sobs.

Mrs. Jervis was distressed, for her daughter was just recovering from a serious illness, and she feared the consequences of such violent emotion. Her mind worked quickly; if she could only get Ethel interested in something, — but what could she do shut up in a car? She spoke again to her neighbor.

"Did n't you say there were some travelers in the next car not so comfortable as we are?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered; "a mother and three children, one a baby, going to Dalton, where the father has just got work. They look poor, and are not very warmly clad. The conductor says he can't keep two cars warm;

fuel is getting scarce; and he 's going to bring them in here."

"Do you hear that, Ethel?" said her mother anxiously; "there 's a baby coming into our car."

Ethel was usually very fond of babies, but now she could think of nothing but her disappointment, and only an impatient jerk of her shoulders showed that she heard.

At this moment the door opened, and the conductor appeared, followed by the few passengers from the other car, among them the shivering family with the baby. The mother looked pale and tired, and sank into the first seat.

Mrs. Jervis rose, obliging Ethel to sit up, and went toward the weary woman.

"Let me take the baby a while," she said pleasantly; "you look tired out."

Tears came into the eyes of the poor mother.

"Oh, thank you," she said; "the baby is fretting for her milk; she won't eat anything I can get for her."

"Of course she won't," said Mrs. Jervis, as she lifted the baby, who, though poorly dressed, was clean and sweet; "sensible baby! we must try to get milk for her!" She turned to the conductor.

"Is n't there a farmhouse somewhere about here where some benevolent gentleman might get milk for a suffering baby?" and she looked with a smile at the passenger who had been giving the unwelcome news.

"No," said the conductor, "I think not any near enough to be reached in this storm; but I have an idea that there 's a case of condensed milk in the baggage-car; I 'll see," and he hurried out.

"That 's a providential baggage-car," said Mrs. Jervis. "How much we might have suffered but for its fortunate stores!"

"Yes," replied her neighbor gravely; "a fast of a week would n't be very comfortable."

"And jack rabbits are tiptop!" burst in Harry Jervis. His mother smiled.

"I 'm glad you like them, Harry; I should

like them better bounding away over the prairies on their own long legs than served up half cooked, on a newspaper for plates, — to be eaten with fingers, too," she added.

"Fingers were made before forks!" said Harry triumphantly, repeating an old saying which had been quoted quite often in that car of late.

"Your fingers were not, Harry!" said Mrs. Jervis, laughing. "However, we have cause to be thankful, even for jack rabbits eaten with our fingers."

At this moment entered a brakeman with a can of condensed milk. "The conductor sent this to you, ma'am," he said.

"But it isn't open!" said Mrs. Jervis in dismay; "and I did n't think to bring a can-opener. If I had only known of this picnic-party, I might have provided myself."

"I 'll open it," said her neighbor, taking out a pocket knife; "I 've opened many a can in my travels on the plains."

"Don't take off the top," said Mrs. Jervis. "Make two holes in the cover." He looked

up in surprise. She went on: "One to let out the milk, and the other to let in the air so that it can get out."

"Well, if that is n't an idea!" said the man, a broad grin spreading over his face. "It takes a woman to think of that contrivance!"

"You see," said Mrs. Jervis, "that keeps the milk in the can clean, and it pours out as well as if the whole top was off."

"Sure!" said the man; "I 'll never forget that little trick; thank you, ma'am!"

Mrs. Jervis smiled. "You 're quite welcome," she said, as she proceeded to dilute the milk with water from the cooler, and to warm the mixture on the stove, using her own silver traveling-cup for the purpose.

While she was doing this, she had put the baby on Ethel's lap, saying quietly, "You hold her a minute till I get the milk ready."

Ethel half grudgingly took the feebly wailing baby; but when the milk was warmed and the hungry little creature quietly fell asleep in her arms, she showed no desire to

give her up. Mrs. Jervis, having procured a pillow from the porter, — for this was a sleeping-car, — laid the sleeping infant on the seat opposite her own.

Meanwhile, the idea she had been all this time seeking — the plan for giving Ethel something to think of besides herself — had come to her, and she now suggested it to her daughter, who had stopped crying, though she still looked very unhappy.

"Ethel," she said, "did you notice those poor children back there?"

"No," said Ethel indifferently.

"Well," said her mother, "I wish you'd go and tell the mother that the baby is sleeping comfortably, and I'll look after her."

Ethel was accustomed to mind, and though she looked as if she did n't fancy the errand, she rose and slowly walked through the car to the back seats where the strangers were seated, delivered her message, and returned.

"They don't look very comfortable, do they?" said Mrs. Jervis.

"No, indeed!" said Ethel with some inter-

est; "that girl had a little, old shawl pinned on, and looked half frozen at that."

"I don't suppose they have ever been really comfortable," went on Mrs. Jervis. "I should like to fix them all up warm and nice for once in their lives."

Ethel did not reply, but she was thinking.

"I wonder if *they* were going anywhere for Christmas," she said slowly.

"They look as if they did not know what Christmas is," answered her mother. "I don't believe they ever had one."

"It would be fun to fix up a tree for them," said Ethel, who had enjoyed helping to arrange a Christmas celebration the preceding year in an orphan asylum; "but of course no one can do anything shut up in this old car!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Mrs. Jervis; "a good deal can be done by willing hands."

"I don't see what!" said Ethel.

"Well," said her mother, "you could at least make the girl a rag-doll like those you made for the orphans last winter."

"What could I make it of?" asked Ethel somewhat scornfully.

"I have an idea," said Mrs. Jervis. "I think I can get something from the porter."

Like most persons who set out with determination, Mrs. Jervis overcame all obstacles. With the consent of the conductor, who assumed the responsibility for the Company, she bought of the porter a clean sheet, and a towel with a gay border, and returned to her seat. Out of her traveling-bag she took sewing implements, and in a short time Ethel was busily engaged in fashioning a rag-doll. She rolled up a long strip of the clean cotton for the doll's body, sewing it tightly in place, and made a similar but much smaller roll for the arms, which she sewed on to the body in proper position. She marked the features of the face with a black lead pencil, and then dressed it in a strip of the towel, leaving the red border as a trimming around the hem of the dress, and a narrow strip of the same gay border for a sash, which was tied in a fine bow at the back. On the head, to conceal the

raw edges of the cotton, she made a tiny hood of another piece of the red border, and though you might not think it, it was really a very presentable doll.

Meanwhile the idea had spread among the passengers, and other hands were busy with the same purpose. One elderly lady, who had been occupying her time knitting with red wool a long, narrow strip intended to make a stripe in a large afghan, deliberately raveled out the whole, and, bringing out of her bag a pair of fine needles, set up some mittens for the cold-looking red hands of the boy.

Another lady passenger produced a small shoulder shawl, which she proceeded to make — with the help of Mrs. Jervis's needles and thread — into a warm hood for the little girl. Another lady made of an extra wrap she carried an ample cloak for the baby, and Mrs. Jervis resolved to give the thinly dressed mother a large cape she had brought in case they should ride the last two miles of their journey in an open sleigh in a snowstorm.

The whole carload, with nothing to oc-

cupy them, soon caught the enthusiasm; and before the day was over, nearly every one was doing what could be done with such limited means to make a pleasant Christmas for the little family occupying so quietly the back section in the car, and feeling so out of place among the well-to-do passengers.

Not only were articles for their comfort made, but toys for the children. Many a man, in the intervals of shoveling snow, at which each man took his turn, called up the resources of boyhood, and whittled precious things out of wood; a whistle and a toy sled for the boy; a cradle made of a cigar box, with rockers nailed on with pins, for the girl, and fitted with bedding from her mother's sheet by Ethel, with a piece of the shoulder shawl for coverlid.

Even Harry wanted to help, and begged his mother for an empty spool, out of which he could make a real top which would spin. Mrs. Jervis had no empty spool, but she took the largest one she had, wound off the thread on a card, and gave it to him, and he whittled out a beautiful top.

All these things could be done in the same car with the family, for they were very shy, and kept strictly to the last compartment, where the conductor had placed them.

As Christmas day drew near, the question of a tree began to be considered, for Ethel could not entertain the idea of Christmas without one. She consulted the porter, who entered into the spirit of the thing warmly, and as he had noticed some trees not far back, near the track, he managed to cut off a large branch from one. Shaking it free from the snow, he set it up in a box, under Ethel's directions, making it stand steadily upright with chunks of coal packed in the box around it, and it really looked something like a tree, though it was entirely bare of leaves, for it was not an evergreen.

The baggage-car was decided upon for the celebration, and all day before Christmas Ethel and Harry, as well as most of the passengers by turns, were very busy there. Ethel covered the box of coal with the remains of the sheet; candles for the tree, with all their ingenuity,

they were unable to manage, but a fine effect was produced by a brilliant red lantern, which a brakeman lent for the occasion, placed in among the branches.

All the gifts — and they were surprisingly numerous — were hung about the tree, and the bare spaces filled up with paper ladders and rings of dancing dolls and long curling tassels and fringes, all of which Ethel cut with the scissors out of newspapers. These last decorations were added with locked doors, only the porter being allowed to see them.

It was really a very effective show, though so odd, and after the passengers had enjoyed their evening meal of jack rabbits roasted before the fire, with dry crackers for bread, and water to drink, they were all invited by the smiling colored porter to proceed to the baggage-car.

The Grey family, for whom all this had been done, were gallantly escorted by the porter himself, who even carried the baby, now bright and smiling on its diet of condensed milk.

The baggage-car presented a gay appearance,

brilliantly lighted by many brakeman's lanterns. Trunks were stowed away in one end, except those needed for seats, and in a few moments the women and children were seated, while all the men of the train stood around behind them, even to the weary-looking engineer who had been working so hard these two days and nights for their release.

The surprise and delight of the Grey children knew no bounds; and when they found that all these treasures were for them, their ecstasies were beyond control; they laughed and shouted almost like other children, as they had never in their lives done before.

As for the mother, she was simply overcome; tears of happiness ran down her face, and as each gift was placed in her lap, she could only grasp the hand of the giver, — she could not speak.

And what of Ethel! No one would have known her for the unhappy-faced maiden who had so lamented their plight. All this time she had been the moving spirit in the whole matter. She had worked hard herself, and in-

spired others to work, too. She was rosy and happy on this evening, her eyes bright and shining; and when her mother placed in her hand her own Christmas gift, which she had been secretly carrying to grace the tree at Grandma's, her happiness overflowed, and she exclaimed: —

"Why! I almost forgot the party to-night at Grandma's!"

At the close of the evening, as the party were about to return to their car, the conductor rapped for silence, and announced — as the best gift of the evening — that help had come from outside and cut through the drifts, so that before morning they would be able to take up their journey.

It was a very happy-faced Ethel who, the next morning, jumped out of the sleigh which had brought them up from the station, and ran to kiss her grandmother and aunts and cousins, brought together from great distances for the happy Christmas time. And after all, she didn't miss the tree, either, for, although Christmas had passed, all the party begged to

defer the tree till the Jervis family arrived; and there it stood at that moment, all ready for lighting.

Nothing of this was told to the Jervis children, however, till after supper was over, when Grandmother invited the whole company to go into the room where it stood, lighted from the top twig to the pedestal it stood on, and hung full of beautiful gifts.

"That 's a nice story," said Kristy; "it was lovely of them to save the tree for Ethel. It is n't bedtime yet," she went on suggestively, as her mother busied herself with her work.

"No; it is n't bedtime; but you must have had enough stories for one day, Kristy."

"No, indeed! I never have enough!" said Kristy warmly.

"Well, here 's another, then, and it 's true, too." And Mrs. Crawford began.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW A BEAR CAME TO SCHOOL

One warm spring morning, near the town of A ——, away off in the edge of the deep woods, a bear awoke from his long winter sleep, came out of his den under the roots of a great fallen tree, stretched his half-asleep limbs, opened wide his great mouth in a long, long yawn, and then all at once found that he was ravenously hungry; and no wonder! for he had n't had a mouthful to eat since he went to sleep for the winter, months before.

As soon as he was wide awake, and his legs began to feel natural, he started out to find something to eat. There were no berries in the woods yet, no green things that he liked to eat, and, in fact, there was a very poor prospect for breakfast.

Long he wandered about in the woods, finding nothing, and getting more hungry every

minute; and at last he started for the few scattering houses of the village, where he had sometimes found food when it was scarce in the woods.

He did n't like to go near the houses of men, for he generally got hurt when he did so; but he was by this time so very hungry that he almost forgot that all men were his enemies.

Shuffling quietly along on his soft-padded feet, he came to a little house standing all by itself in the edge of the woods. All was quiet about it, except a curious sort of humming noise, which may have reminded him of bees and honey that he liked so well.

Nearer and nearer he came, snuffing the breeze as he came, till he reached the open door of the little house. Into this he thrust his great head, and surely now he smelled something to eat.

It was a schoolhouse, though he did n't know it.

At this moment a little girl looked up from her book, and a wild scream rent the air.

"There 's a bear coming in!" she cried.

Instantly all was confusion; books were dropped, school was forgotten, screams and shouts filled the air, while the teacher — a stranger in that wild country — turned white.

Some of the bigger boys ran towards the door, shouting and waving their arms to frighten the great beast away, but he had smelled the dinner baskets, ranged in the passageway, and he was far too hungry to mind the shouting of boys. The next moment he was fairly in the passage, and there was nothing to prevent his coming into the schoolroom.

Now there is a very wrong impression abroad about bears. Most people — especially children — think that a bear is always roaming around seeking some one to devour; while the truth is that, unless madly hungry or badly treated, a bear will always avoid a human being. In fact, hunters call them cowardly, though a more truthful word would be peaceable. In that schoolroom, however, a bear was the greatest terror in the world.

There was nothing in the way of a door to keep him out of the room, but there was a

great attraction for him in the doughnuts and pieces of pie and cake and apples and other good things he smelled in the dinner baskets, and he set at once to turning over the contents, and eating whatever pleased his fancy.

After her momentary faintness, Miss Brown —the young teacher — roused herself to see what could be done to protect her charges. There was no door between the room and the passage, though there was a suitable opening for one. Glancing around the room, she saw but one thing to do, — to barricade that opening.

Trying to quiet the screams and tears of the children huddled around her, she spoke hurriedly to the biggest boys.

"Boys, we must barricade the doorway while he is busy with the baskets. Bring up the benches as quick as you can!"

All fell to work, and soon benches were piled from the floor to the top of the doorway; but they were so unsteady that one could see that one good push of the big fellow would throw them all down.

"More!" said Miss Brown; "we must brace these up."

So other benches were placed against them in a way to brace them, and when all in the room were used, a tolerably steady wall was made, though of course there were plenty of openings between the benches through which they could see and be seen.

"If he tries to push them down," said Miss Brown with white lips, "we must all throw ourselves against these braces to keep them firm. I think we can keep him till help comes."

The question of help was a serious one. The schoolhouse was placed on the edge of a bluff where the ground dropped suddenly many feet, and strangely enough, all the windows were on that side, so that no one could climb out of a window, and, what was worse, those inside could not attract attention if any one should pass. The windows looked only into the deep woods.

All this became plain to Miss Brown, as she looked around to see what were their chances

of escape. The only hope was that the bear would get enough to eat and go out of his own accord. In this hope she calmed down, and tried to reduce her pupils to order.

Order, however, was not to be thought of. To the terror of the children was soon added their dismay at the havoc the bear was making. One after another basket was turned over and its contents rolled out on the floor, while he contentedly feasted himself on the food. The children could not take their eyes from him, and every time he turned his eyes towards them, they screamed and tried to hide behind Miss Brown.

When at last Bruin had emptied the baskets, and evidently filled himself with the good country lunches, he prepared to take a nap, and rolling his great body over in the small space he hit the open door, and, to the horror of Miss Brown, pushed it shut with a bang that latched it, and made him a prisoner as well as themselves!

Now indeed the stoutest heart turned weak.

"Good Heavens, boys!" said Miss Brown

to the two or three older pupils, "what can we do?"

"I don't see as we can do anything except keep him out of here till men come to look for us," said the oldest boy, who was about fourteen, and used to the ways of the country.

"And that won't be," said Miss Brown, "till they are alarmed because we don't get home."

"Yes," said the boy; "not before five or six o'clock. We're often that late getting home."

This was a dreary prospect, indeed, and wails and cries began again to fill the room. Miss Brown saw that she must rouse herself and quell the panic before it got beyond bounds.

She thought quickly, then said, quietly as she could, though her voice trembled at first:—

"Children, shall I tell you a story?"

Story is a magic word to a child, and in a moment the smaller ones were camped down on the floor around her — having no benches to sit on — while Miss Brown racked her brain

to think of stirring incidents to keep them interested.

Story after story fell from her lips; lunch time came — but there were no lunches. Miss Brown struggled on; words came slowly, — her lips and throat were dry, — she sipped a little water and struggled on.

All sorts of possible and impossible adventures she related; she told strange facts of history with the wildest fancies of romance-makers; fairies and pirates, and queens and beggar girls, in one mad medley. She never in after years could recall anything that passed her lips in those terrible hours.

Some of the smaller children, worn out with crying, fell asleep, and as the hours passed and twilight stole over the world, hope began to revive; surely the fathers of the village must come to seek their children.

The bear still slept, but they dared not make much noise for fear of arousing him. Twilight deepened and night came on, — still no rescue.

Men were out seeking them; all the village, in fact, but when they tried the schoolhouse

door and could not open it, they concluded that school had been dismissed, and turned away to search the woods, — the constant terror of the village parents.

Happily the little party of prisoners in the schoolroom did not know this, or they would have despaired.

A search was started in the woods; lanterns flashed through all the paths and byways between the trees; men called, and women silently cried, but of course no trace of the lost was found.

All night this was kept up, while, on the floor of the schoolroom, all but the two or three older ones, with the completely exhausted teacher, slept in what comfortless attitude they might.

Towards morning a bright thought came to Miss Brown. "They must think we have left the schoolhouse," she thought; "and we must contrive to let them know where we are. When the bear wakes up he will be hungry again," — with a shudder. Then the bright thought came, "Let us make a fire in the stove; the smoke will be a sign."

There was no wood, of course, it being too warm for a fire; but there were some papers and, if need be, books — and it was the first breath of hope.

"But is there a match in the house?" was the appalling thought that paralyzed her. She asked the boys. One thought he had some, and after emptying his pockets of the miscellaneous collection that usually fills a boy's pocket, succeeded in fishing out two worn and draggled-looking matches which looked doubtful about lighting.

Miss Brown took them carefully, prepared some torn paper, and drew a match across the stove; it sputtered— and flashed — and went out. A cry of horror escaped her lips as, sheltering it in her hand, she tried the second. It burned and the paper was lighted, and in a moment the stove was in a glow.

"Miss Brown," whispered one of the older scholars, "I've heard of bears being driven off by fire; we might light a stick and try it, if he wakes up," nodding towards the still sleeping Bruin.

"Thank you — that is worth thinking of," said Miss Brown.

Now the smoke began to pour out of the chimney, and one of the tired men who had been wandering the woods all night saw it.

He uttered a shout, "They 're in the schoolhouse!"

Soon fifty men, on their way home in despair at finding no trace, were about him.

"But the door is locked," said one man. "I tried that the first thing."

"Well, somebody is there!" said one; "and we better break the door in, and see who it is."

They went to the door and knocked, and then pounded, while those inside shouted and cried. At last they were heard, and, coming as near the back windows as they could get, they asked the reason of this strange performance.

"I say!" began the man standing on the edge of the bluff, "who 's in there?"

"We 're all in here," was the answer; "and we can't get out because a big bear is in the passageway."

"Why did you lock the door?" was the next question.

"We did n't. The bear rolled against it. He 's there now. You can't open it."

The good news was quickly carried to the waiting men, and an effort was made to burst in the door, several of the men being provided with guns for their night in the woods.

But Bruin was too heavy for the united efforts, and at last they decided to shoot through the door.

Calling directions to those inside to go close to the wall on the north side so as not to be in danger from any stray bullet, the men began shooting through the door.

It was not long before the bear found it too hot for comfort, and slowly rose to his feet and started for the barricade of benches, now left without a guard.

At that instant the door yielded and burst open, and men and shots and bear and baskets and all came in a mad medley together.

Poor Bruin's troubles were soon over; he paid for his breakfast with his life.

When all was ended, and the men had a chance to look around and see the barricade, and turned to thank Miss Brown for her heroism in protecting the children, she was found in a dead faint on the floor.

It was weeks before she recovered her strength and her voice, after that terrible night, and the schoolroom — put in fresh order, with a door between it and the passage, a window cut through the side of the building, and a big dinner bell provided to ring when help was needed — was opened again for study.

As her mother paused, Kristy drew a deep sigh. "I 'm so glad it ended well; I love to have stories end well."

"Well," said her mother, looking at the clock, "I 'll tell you one more that I think ends very well indeed, for it taught — but" — she interrupted herself, — "I won't tell you the end before the beginning; you shall decide whether it ends well."

CHAPTER XV

HOW LETTIE HAD HER OWN WAY

"I JUST wish I could do as I've a mind to for once in my life!" said Lettie Glover crossly, when her mother refused to allow her to carry out a plan she had made. "I never can do anything I want to," she went on. "I've heard that stepmothers were horrid, but I believe real mothers are just as bad!" and she flounced out of the room.

"Letitia!" called her mother sternly, as she was about to slam the door after her, "come back!"

She turned. "What do you want?" she snapped.

Mrs. Glover was very pale. Lettie had never seen her look so, and in spite of her anger she was frightened.

"I think you need a lesson, my daughter," she said quietly, speaking evidently with diffi-

culty, almost in gasps. "I will let you try your plan; you may do exactly as you choose for twenty-four hours; I shall not see you again till it is over," and, rising, she went to her own room, and locked the door.

Lettie stood as if stunned; she remembered, suddenly, what the doctor had said, that her mother's health was precarious, that she must not be agitated; and a feeling of dismay rushed over her; but a thought of what her mother had refused her returned, and she hardened herself again.

"I don't believe what the old doctor said, anyway," she muttered; "and I'll have a good time for once! Oh! won't I!" as the thought of what she would do came over her.

"In the first place," she thought, "of course I'll go on Stella's moonlight excursion to-night; mother's objections are nonsense. I know Stella's friends are a little wild; but they 're awfully jolly all the same, and I know we'll have lots of fun — and I do love a sail on the river. I'll wear my new white dress, too," she went on, as the thought of her perfect

freedom grew upon her; "I don't believe I 'll hurt it, and if it is soiled a little it can be done up before Aunt Joe's party that mother 's so wonderfully particular about."

It was now time to start for school, but she at once decided not to go. "I 'll have a good time for once," she said, "and get rid of that horrid grammar lesson. Now I 'll go over to Stella's and tell her I'm going;" and she went to her room to get ready.

"I won't wear this old dress," she said scornfully; "for once I 'll dress as I please; mother 's so notional about street dress!"

In her own room she threw off the scorned dark school dress and brought from her clothes-press a new light blue silk, just made for her to wear on very special occasions. "I 'll wear this," she said; "I shan't hurt it; and I want Stella to see that other folks can have nice dresses as well as she."

Hurriedly she put on the pretty dress and the ribbons that went with it. Then, taking off her sensible street shoes, she put on the delicate ones that belonged to the dress.

Looking at herself in the glass, another thought occurred to her: "I'll wear my gold beads, too; mother never lets me wear them in the street, but other folks wear them, and I don't see any use of having things if you can't wear them."

From a jewel case in her drawer she took a beautiful string of large gold beads. They had belonged to her grandmother, and had been given to her because she was named after her, Letitia, though she had softened it into Lettie, "and little enough, too," she had said, "to pay for having such an old-fashioned name, when Mildred, or Ethel, or Eva, or Maude would have been so much prettier."

The beads she clasped around her throat, then she pinned on the little gold chatelaine watch her mother had given her at Christmas, and — resolving for once to wear as much jewelry as she liked — she slipped on to her finger a ring bequeathed to her by her Aunt Letitia. It was of diamonds; five beautiful stones in a row, worth a great deal of money, and far too fine for a schoolgirl to wear, her

mother said. Much as she longed to wear it and show it to the girls, she had never been allowed to do so. "Now," she exultingly thought, "now I'll have the good of it for once!"

To all this finery she added her best hat, which had just come home from the milliner's, and taking a pair of fresh white kid gloves in her hand, which she could n't put on to cover up that ring, she started out, feeling more elegant than she had ever felt in her life before.

The way to Stella's was through a corner of the park, and everything that morning was so fresh and sweet that Lettie lingered as she passed through. There were not many people there so early in the morning, and Lettie paid no attention to a rough-looking man she passed, sitting on a bench and looking as if he had passed the night there. Her way lay on the border of the wilder and more secluded part of the park, and her mother had always warned her to avoid this part when she was alone. She had therefore never penetrated the fascinating little paths which led among the close-

growing trees and bushes, though she had always longed to do so. Now, on the day of her perfect freedom, the temptation came up again. She hesitated; her mother's warning recurred to her.

"I don't believe there 's a bit of danger," she said to herself; "mother 's so old-fashioned. Girls don't do as they did when she was young; they can take care of themselves nowadays. I mean to see where this little path goes; it looks so lovely and cool in there."

She turned into the path. It was charming; birds were singing, flowers blooming, and she walked on and on, enchanted.

After a little, however, she was struck with the loneliness of the place, and a thought of her mother's warning made her turn back towards the more frequented walks. As she turned she found herself facing the man she had noticed on the bench, and a panic seized her. She tried to rush past him, but he barred the way. She tried to scream, but she could not make a sound; and the man spoke.

"No you don't, my fine miss! If you make

a noise I 'll brain you!" and he flourished a heavy stick he carried. "If you behave yourself like a lady," he went on, less roughly, "I 'll not hurt you in the least."

"Let me pass!" cried Lettie, white with terror.

"Certainly, miss," said he gruffly, "in one minute; just as soon as you give me those beads on your neck, and that watch; and if you hand 'em over quietly yourself you 'll save me the trouble of gagging you with this,"— dragging a filthy handkerchief from his pocket, — "and taking them off myself; 'n I ain 't no lady's maid, either," he added grimly, "'n I might possibly hurt you!"

Frightened half out of her wits, Lettie raised her hand to unclasp her necklace, when the flash of the diamonds on her finger caught the sharp eye of the thief.

"Golly," he said, "better 'n I thought! I 'll trouble you to slip off that ring, too."

"Oh, no!" cried Lettie, "I can't!"

"Oh, well! I can take it off myself," he said. "If it 's tight I 'll just take finger and

all," and he took out and opened a great clasp knife.

Then Lettie saw the uselessness of protest, and with despair in her heart she drew off the ring and dropped it into the dirty hand extended to receive it. Instantly it followed the beads and watch into his pocket, and he stood aside, leaving the path open for her to pass, saying, with a horrid grin, "Now you may go, miss, and thank you kindly for your generosity."

Along that path Lettie flew till she reached one of the main avenues where people were constantly passing, when she fell into a seat, wild-eyed, and almost fainting.

"What 's the matter?" asked a gruff policeman who came near. "What you been doing, miss?"

"Oh, go after the thief!" she cried; "I've been robbed."

"Which way did he go?" asked the man, evidently not believing her, the idea of being robbed in broad daylight, here in the park, appearing to seem absurd to him.

"Down that path," cried Lettie excitedly, "a great rough man with a big stick! Oh! do go! he has my gold beads and my diamond ring and"—

Whether the policeman did not care to encounter a rough thief with a big stick, or whether he really did not believe her, he here interrupted with:—

"I guess he has your sense, too! I think I better run you in — you'll do fine for the crazy ward!"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, no!" cried Lettie, this new danger filling her with terror. "Never mind; let him go, but don't arrest me. It would kill my mother, and me too!"

"Well, then, don't talk so crazy," said he gruffly. "I don't believe your story — nor nobody won't, an' if it's true, 'n I should get him, I'd have to lock you up for a witness. Tell me where you live, 'n I'll see you safe home."

"Oh, no!" she cried, tears running down her face, "I'll go right home. My mother is sick, and it would kill her!"

The man was evidently touched by her distress.

"Well, miss, you just walk along, and I'll keep you in sight to see that no more robbers get after you."

With that she was forced to be contented, and with all the strength left to her she hurried along the paths towards home, the policeman following at a little distance and keeping her in sight till she ran up the steps of her home and disappeared inside.

Lettie ran up to her room, and, locking the door, flung herself on the bed, where she had a long cry, partly from nervous strain from the fright she had suffered, and partly for the loss of her treasures.

"I was a fool!" she said bitterly. "Mother always told me it was unsafe to wear jewelry in the streets and to go into those solitary paths in the park; but I didn't believe her. I was a fool, and I'm well paid for it! I'll never tell her — never!

"And I shall never dare to let father know, either," she went on later; "he'd scour the

world to find that man, and I should have to be locked up as a witness," — she shuddered, — "I 'd rather lose everything."

A good deal subdued by this experience, she almost decided to give up the particular thing which had given her her liberty for the day, — the moonlight sail on the river. But after hours, when she had calmed down and decided that she would keep her experiences and her losses a secret from everybody, the thought of the great temptation again stirred her, and she finally resolved to carry out her plan and go.

"It 's likely," she said to herself, "that I 'll never have another chance to do as I like," — not for years, anyway, — and I 'll have the good of this one." Having come to this decision, Lettie found herself hungry, for she had been too excited to take any luncheon at the usual hour. She accordingly went down to the pantry where the cook had spread out the morning's baking; there was a goodly array of pies and cakes and other good things cooling on the shelves, and Lettie thought herself in great luck.

"Now I 'll have a good lunch," she said to herself, "and no bread and butter, either! I hate bread and butter!"

She helped herself to several little cakes which cook made particularly nice, and with them she ate part of a jar of marmalade which she opened for the purpose; next she took a tart or two, and then turned her attention to the row of pies on another shelf. Looking them over carefully, she chose her favorite, a custard pie. "Now I won't eat any old crust, as mother makes me," she said. So she took a spoon and began on the contents of the pie, thus demolishing, I regret to say, a whole pie. Then, calmly dipping into a pan of milk, taking cream and all, she drank a glass of that, and, feeling fully satisfied, she left the pantry, and returned to her room to prepare for the evening.

"I guess I 'll wear this silk dress after all," she said to herself, for she was invited to stay all night with Stella after the sail. "I 'll have to come home through the streets in the morning, and if the white one gets soiled it won't

look very nice; and besides, I want mother to see that I can take care of my clothes myself."

So, wearing her pretty silk dress and delicate shoes, and carrying another pair of gloves, — for she had lost the white ones in the excitement of the morning, — she started out, leaving word with the servants that she should stay with Stella all night.

She reached the house safely, and was warmly welcomed by Stella, and in the excitement of planning and talking over the sail of the evening she almost forgot, for a time, the unpleasant affair of the morning.

"It 's a pity you wore that pretty new dress," said Stella, who was clad in a sailor suit of dark wool, for the boating; "I 'm afraid you 'll spoil it, — a boat 's a dirty place."

"I guess I shan't hurt it," said Lettie.

"I wish you 'd wear one of my woolen suits," said Stella; "I hate to see a pretty dress spoiled, and that could n't be hurt."

"No, indeed!" said Lettie; "I could n't wear any one's dress, and if that gets spoiled —

why, I 'll have to get another," she added proudly, though she knew in her heart that her mother could not afford another, that season.

" Well," said Stella, " you must of course do as you choose."

The boating party consisted, besides Stella and Lettie, and Stella's cousin Maud, of Stella's brother and two of his friends. These two young men it was to whom Lettie's mother had objected. They were rather wild fellows, sons of rich men, and not obliged to do anything, given up to sports and rather noisy pranks in the city. They were intimate with Stella's brother, who was one of their kind also.

The moon rose about nine o'clock that evening, and at that hour the gay party took their way to the little boathouse, where they embarked in a small sailboat which was waiting for them.

The young men understood the management of a boat, and for a time all went well. They talked and laughed and sang, and enjoyed the moonlight and the rapid motion,

and Lettie thought she never had such a lovely time in her life.

After awhile the spirit of teasing began to show itself among the boys. They liked to frighten the girls, as thoughtless boys often do, and after such harmless pranks as spattering water over them, to hear their little screams of protest, they fell to the more dangerous, but very common, play of rocking the boat, threatening to upset it.

The girls, resolved not to be frightened, for a long time did not cry out, and this drew the boys on to greater exertions, determined to make them scream and beg. At last the thing happened that so often does happen to reckless boys, — a sudden puff of wind caught the sail, the boat lurched, and in a moment the whole party were struggling in the water.

Thoroughly frightened now, the boys, who could all swim, at first struck out for the shore, which was at some distance. Then, recalled to their senses by the cries of the girls, two of them turned back to their aid. Whether they would have reached the shore with their fright-

ened and unmanageable burdens is uncertain, but, a tugboat happening to come along, they were all picked up and carried to a dock a mile or more below.

There, after waiting a half hour, drenched and chilled all through, while the boys tried in vain to get a carriage, — for by this time it was very late, — the party took a street car, which carried them up town, but not near Stella's, and they had to wait another half hour at a crossing for another car.

It was two o'clock in the morning before Lettie, with Stella and her brother, reached the house, a wretched, draggled-looking, and very cross party, all without hats, — for these had been lost in the river, — and Lettie, her fine silk dress a ruin, her delicate shoes a shapeless mass from which the water squirted as she walked.

By breakfast time Lettie, who was a delicate girl, was in a high fever, and the doctor, who was hastily called in, decided that she was threatened with pneumonia. Lettie's mother was notified, and hurried down, and, bundled up in many wraps, Lettie was conveyed in an

ambulance to her home and her own bed, where she remained for weeks, battling for her life, delirious much of the time, and living over in fancy the horrors of the day she had had her own way.

Some weeks later, after her recovery, her mother, one morning, said quietly, "Lettie, let us count up the cost of your doing as you liked."

Lettie trembled, but her mother went on.

"There 's your dress and hat and shoes ruined and lost in the river — consequently the loss of your visit to your Aunt Joe ; there 's your illness, which deprived you of the school-closing festivities ; and the doctor's bill, which took all the money I had saved for our trip to the seashore this summer."

She was going on, but Lettie, now thoroughly penitent, suddenly resolved to make a clean breast of all her losses, and have the thing over.

"Oh, mother !" she cried, burying her face in her mother's lap, "that is n't all my losses ; I must tell you, I can't bear it any

longer alone," and then with sobs and tears she told the dismal story of the robbery.

"Lettie," said her mother, "I knew all that the very day it happened. After you had gone to Stella's the policeman came to the house to see if you had told him the truth. When he told me what you had said I went to your room and discovered the loss."

"Oh, mother!" cried Lettie, "I 'll never — never" —

"If I had not learned it then," went on her mother, "I should have known it later, for in your delirium you talked of nothing else; you went over that fearful scene constantly. I feared it would really affect your reason."

"Oh, mother!" cried Lettie, "you never told me!"

"We will not speak of it again," said her mother; "I think you have learned your lesson."

"Do you think it ended well, Kristy?" asked her mother as she finished the story.

"Well," said Kristy hesitating, "I suppose it was a good thing for her to find out that her

mother was right, — but was n't it horrid for her to lose all those beautiful things ! "

" It was a costly lesson," said Mrs. Crawford ; " but I think it was much needed — she was a willful girl."

Just at that moment the door opened and Uncle Tom entered.

" Well," he said, " how did Kristy get through the rainy day that spoiled her picnic ? "

" In the usual way," answered Mrs. Crawford.

" Levying on everybody for stories ? " asked Uncle Tom.

" Yes," said Kristy ; " and I 've had the loveliest ones " —

" Kristy," said Uncle Tom, " I want to give you a birthday present, but knowing your preference for stories, I did not venture to offer you anything else. So, happening to hear a specially interesting one to-day, I have persuaded the relater to come and tell it to you."

Mrs. Crawford looked up in surprise. " Tom," she said doubtingly, " what new pranks are

you up to now? You 're almost as young as Kristy herself."

Uncle Tom tried to look very meek, but there was a twinkle in his eye which did not look meek at all.

"Please, sister mine," he began, "our niece Katherine — otherwise Kate — has just got back from San Francisco, or what is left of it. She went through the earthquake and the fire, lost all her goods and chattels, and found a baby, which she has brought home. She is in the hall waiting to be received."

Before the last words were spoken Mrs. Crawford had risen and hurried into the hall, where, sure enough, the refugee from San Francisco, a girl about fourteen years old, sat smiling, with a pretty little girl of perhaps two years in her lap.

"Uncle Tom wanted me to make my visit to you to-night," she said, after she had been warmly welcomed and taken into the sitting-room, "as a present to Kristy, who is as fond of stories as ever, I hear."

"Indeed she is!" said Mrs. Crawford, "and

in this case we shall all be very much interested to hear your adventures. It must have been a fearful experience."

"It was," said Kate; "but now that it is over I think that I, at least, have gained more than I lost, because I found this baby — though what I shall do with her I don't know yet. Of course I have tried my best to find her parents, for, if living, they must be nearly crazy about her."

"Surely they must," said Mrs. Crawford; "she is a darling."

"Well!" interrupted Uncle Tom, looking at his watch, "time is passing; is Kristy to have her story?"

With a smile at his pretended anxiety, Kate began.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW KATE FOUND A BABY

I HAD been spending the winter, as you know, with my sister in San Francisco, going to school, and I was expecting to come home in a few days when the thing happened.

I was awakened by being flung violently out of bed across the room, where all the light furniture, such as chairs and all loose things, followed me. I tried to get up, but I could not stand, the house shook so. It seemed like a ship in a rough sea. In a minute the plastering began to fall, and I feared it would fall on my head, so by hard work I dragged myself to the door, which I tried to open. At first it was jammed so tight together that I could not stir it, but the next shake of the house flung it wide open, and I crept into the hall, where I found the whole family hurrying out of their rooms, all in nightclothes, of course, and scared most to death.

"We must get out of the house before the walls fall," said my brother-in-law, helping his wife down the stairs, which swayed and tottered as if they would fall, every minute. We all followed them in such a hurry that I don't remember how I got to the bottom. I only remember finding myself on the sidewalk in my nightdress, barefooted and bareheaded, of course.

We did not think how we looked; the street was full of people, many of them as little dressed as we, and all hurrying to get out of the streets, where any minute the houses might fall on them. Our apartment was in a large apartment house in a street full of tall buildings, and when I looked up at them I saw them rock and bend towards each other, so that it seemed as if they would fall together and crush us all.

My first trouble was getting separated from my sister and her husband, in the confusion of the crowd. I soon found myself alone among strangers. I tried to turn back to find them, but everybody was going the other way

and I could n't move a step, so I had to go with the crowd. I was pushed and hurried on with the rest towards a park at the end of the street, feeling desolate enough, you may be sure.

Strange things I saw on the way; none of the people more than half dressed, and many of them just as they got out of bed, but one and all, except myself, carrying some of their possessions. Some had armfuls of clothes which they had snatched up as they ran, and they kept dropping shoes and light things, so that the street was littered with them and I was constantly stumbling over them; some had an armful of books or papers; others carried pieces of china or silver; many had satchels or suit-cases, and one or two were dragging trunks.

A great many people had children; some holding one and dragging one or two others; more than one I saw carrying sick persons unable to walk.

It was curious to see the number of pets that were being carried; birds, of course, many in

cages, but some in the hands — such as parrots. One woman had three cages of canaries, which she had the greatest difficulty in holding; another had a birdcage in one hand and a great cat in the other arm. There was no end to the small dogs in arms — barking and howling, most of them; but the cats were struggling as if scared out of their wits. Sometimes a bird or a cat would break away and disappear at once in the crowd, and I wondered where the poor things went. But many were carried safely, I am sure, for the park, where we all — thousands of us — spent the day and night, seemed to have almost as many animals as people.

In the park I found the baby. She was sitting on the ground, holding in her arms a big cat. She was smiling and talking to "Kitty," and did not seem at all frightened by the crowd and the confusion around her. I thought her mother must have left her for a minute, and I sat down beside her to keep watch that no harm came to her.

There I sat all that day and night, but no



In the park I found a baby . . .
. . . and I sat down beside it.

one came to claim her. She could not tell me anything, of course, but she took kindly to me. Indeed, she seemed to adopt me from the first minute, and she was so sweet I could n't bear to leave her. She never once cried except when she got very hungry, and when she found, in the morning, that her cat had gone.

I had, after the first attempt, given up going about looking for my sister. I knew she would be looking for me, and I could not bear to leave the baby, as I said. Through that long night I sat watching the city burn, holding in my arms the dear little thing, who slept through it all. I was so excited that I almost forgot that I was not dressed. Many people around me were in the same plight, but it was a warm night, so that we did not suffer.

But how alone I did feel! I did not know whether Belle and Harry were alive, nor how I should ever get home. It seemed as if we should all be burned up, anyway. The park was almost as crowded as a city; people everywhere around me; some lying asleep, tired out, on the bare ground; others mourning

over their losses, and others guarding the few things they had saved. One woman near me had two pillow-cases full of things, which she sat on all night, and another had a bedquilt, which she spread out for her four children to lie on.

It 's very queer, but I seem to forget about a good deal of the time the next day, for I can hardly remember how long it was when, after hours of walking, it seemed to me, I reached the place where food was being given out, the baby in my arms, of course. And not until I had eaten a piece of bread and seen her nibbling on one, too, did I seem to come to myself and rouse myself to see what I could do.

All this time baby was still mourning her lost kitty, and trying to take every cat she saw. It was wonderful how many people had cats with them; some held by a string, some in birdcages, but many held in arms. When the people got food I noticed that they always seemed to share with their pets. There were a great many dogs, but they were not so wild as the cats; they stayed by their friends.

There were lots and lots of canaries in cages, and parrots and other large birds, some in cages and some held in hands or seated on the shoulders of their owners.

After having something to eat and getting really waked up, I began to think what I should do. My first thought was to try to get over to Oakland, where we had friends, so I started off towards the ferry. My feet were blistered and sore, and it was hard to walk; my hair was flying every way, for of course my braids had come out and I had no comb or brush. I must have looked like a crazy creature. As I came past a wagon in which a woman was distributing clothes, she noticed me and spoke to me. I had not seen that she had clothes. She called out, "See here, my girl! I think I have a bundle for you," and she put a large package in my hands, marked, "To be given to some one girl in need."

"You look like the one for whom this was intended," she said kindly, as I took the package, "and I think I can give you something for the baby, too," she went on.

She did not find any clothes suitable, but she gave me a white flannel petticoat to wrap round her. Then I borrowed a knife from a man who was cutting bread, and cut armholes, and slipped the petticoat over her. The band came around her shoulders, and her nightgown covered her neck and arms. She did look too cute for anything in her odd dress.

As soon as I could find a rather quiet place under a low tree — for I was still in the park — I opened my bundle. I wish I could know the woman who made up that package, I should like to have her know what a godsend it was; why, it held a complete outfit for a girl of my size, from shoes and stockings up to a hat. Nothing had been forgotten — underclothes — towel — soap — comb — pins — handkerchief — even ribbons to tie the hair. Above all, a comfortable dress of some gray goods, which fitted me pretty well.

It didn't take me long to put them on, to comb my hair, and wash myself and baby with the towel wet in a pond, and then I began to feel more like myself. With both of us com-

fortably dressed I started again with fresh courage for the ferry to Oakland.

I had to go a very roundabout way, so many streets were closed because of the fires raging everywhere. I have n't said much about the fires, but it seemed to me the whole world was burning up. I am sure I walked miles, and not knowing that part of the city very well, I guess I walked more than I needed to.

As I was passing wearily down one of the streets I happened to glance over the other side, and saw my brother-in-law. He was hurrying the other way, going out towards the park, looking for me.

I cried out, "Harry!"

He turned, looked over, but seeing only a well-dressed girl with a child in her arms, was rushing, on when I called out again.

"Harry! don't you know me? I 'm Kate!"

Then he hurried over, perfectly astounded.

"Why, Kate!" he cried, "where did you get those clothes? Did you bring them from the house? And whose baby is that? Thank

God I have found you! Belle is nearly crazy about you!"

Of course I told my story as we hurried to the ferry. He did not object to the baby; he fell in love with her as I had, and neither of us dreamed of leaving her, and he carried her himself. He told me that he and my sister, after looking in vain for me, and suffering agonies about me, had managed to get over the ferry that first day, and were with friends in Oakland. As soon as he got Belle safely through he had come back to look for me. He had great trouble to get back, for people were not allowed to land in the city. He had to hire a man who had a small boat to bring him over. He had been roaming the streets ever since — that was a whole day and another night, you know.

He had brought from Oakland a raincoat to put over me, the only thing that could be found, our friends having already given everything they had to destitute people. Even my sister, he said, was not more than half dressed. The raincoat, which he held on his arm, I

did not need, and when we came upon a lady not even so well dressed as I had been, I proposed to give it to her. She took it with sobs and tears of thanks. Learning that she had friends in Oakland, Harry offered to have her join us, but she was looking for her family and would not go.

You can't imagine what crowds were packing the ferry boats. We had to wait hours before we could get on one. Such a jam I never saw. I should never have got over alone. I had to hang on to Harry's arm with all my strength, while he held baby up high so that she should not be crushed. It was fearful!

On the boat were more strange sights. I saw several women with big hats on, and nothing else but nightclothes; but queerest were men in similar costume with hats on their heads — they did look too funny for anything. I saw girls with dolls in their arms, and some with cats and dogs and parrots. A good many women had Japanese kimonos, and others were loaded with jewelry, chains and bracelets, and there were people wrapped like Indians, in

blankets and sheets they had snatched from their beds. Oh, I can never tell you half the strange things I saw on that boat!

When we got to our friends in Oakland we found the house full, and my sister had been almost wild about me. She was surprised enough to see me well dressed, and with baby, too.

Of course none of us had any money, and our friends had given away all they happened to have out of the bank at the time, so we had to stay there a few days. The railroads carried people free to Los Angeles, and there my brother-in-law could get money and buy clothes, but the cars were so crowded that it was two or three days before we could get a chance to go, and when we did get there we stayed a few days to prepare for our journey home. Belle came with me and baby, but Harry went back to San Francisco to see about starting business again.

Belle wants to keep baby herself, unless her parents appear, but I can't bear to give her up, though I suppose it would be ridicu-

lous for a schoolgirl to adopt a baby, and mother such an invalid that she could n't have the care of her. Is n't she sweet, though?

"She 's a precious pet," said Mrs Crawford, holding her closely in her arms. "I should dearly love to keep her myself!"

"Oh, do!" cried Kristy eagerly, "that is, if Kate 'll give her up. What 's her name, Kate?"

"Of course I don't know her real name," said Kate; "but I think I shall call her Francesca, after the place where I found her."

"That 'll be good," said Kristy.

But now Uncle Tom interrupted, taking the sleepy baby in his arms.

"Miss Francesca ought to be in bed long ago, so we must say good-night, everybody," and he started off. Kristy cried after him, "Good-night, Uncle Tom, and thank you for the fine ending to my Rainy Day Picnic."

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